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THESIS

**SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES IN THE PEOPLE'S
LIBERATION ARMY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN
INTEGRAL UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE MISSION**

by

Xavier Gerard Smith

June 2005

Thesis Advisor:
Second Reader:

Lyman H. Miller
Kalev Sepp

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AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTEGRAL UNCONVENTIONAL
WARFARE MISSION**

Xavier G Smith
Lieutenant Commander, United States Navy
B.A., University of Arizona, 1994

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from the

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June 2005**

Author: Xavier Gerard Smith

Approved by: Professor Lyman H. Miller

Professor Kalev Sepp

Douglas Porch
Chairman, Department of National Security Affairs

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ABSTRACT

The three objectives to this thesis are: to determine through historical investigation the primary motivations and impetuses behind the creation and development of special operations forces (SOF) within the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China; to provide a detailed briefing of modern PLA SOF; to determine whether PLA SOF contingents will develop an American "Green Beret"-type Unconventional Warfare (UW) capability in the immediate future. The third objective will be ascertained through a brief investigation of the history, motivations and national strategy behind the United States Army Special Forces. It will also examine the doctrinal leanings of Local War Under High Tech Conditions, as well as the strategic and political objectives of the People's Republic of China (PRC), and how both factors pertain to and affect the missions of PLA SOF. Through the course of this thesis' research, it was discovered that doctrinal changes within the PLA, post-1979 PLA modernization and professionalization efforts, financial constraints on regional power projection goals, and the First Gulf War were the primary drivers behind the creation and development of PLA SOF. At present, an integral UW capability within PLA SOF is constrained by the Chinese military's current doctrinal emphasis--fighting a short war--and the PRC's strategic and political goals--translating regional economic interdependence into regional dominance.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND SYMBOLS

APEC-Asia Pacific Economic Conference (followed by corresponding year)
ASEAN-Association of South East Asian Nations
BUD/S-Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL
C2-Command and control
C4ISR-Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
CA-Civil Affairs
CEP-Circular Error of Probability
CIA-Central Intelligence Agency
CIDG-Civilian Irregular Defense Group
CLMV-Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam (the poor-four)
CCP-Chinese Communist Party
CMC-Central Military Commission
CP-Counter Proliferation
CSAR-Combat Search And Rescue
CT-Counter-Terrorism
DA-Direct Action
DEVGRU-Development Group (formerly SEAL Team 6)
DOD-Department Of Defense
DPP-Democratic People's Party
DPRK-Democratic People's Republic of Korea
EOD-Explosive Ordnance Disposal (followed by corresponding number)
FID-Foreign Internal Defense
GDP-Gross Domestic Product
GPS-Global Positioning System
GRUMEC-Grupo de Mergulhadores de Combate (Brazilian Combat Divers)
GWOT-Global War On Terrorism
HQ-Headquarters
HSC-Helicopter Support Combat (followed by corresponding numbers)
HUMINT-Human Intelligence

IL-Ilyushin (followed by corresponding numbers)
IW-Information Warfare
KMT-Kuomintang
KSK-Kommando Spezialkraefte (German Special Forces)
MCP-Malayan Communist Party
NSA-National Security Affairs
NSC-National Security Council (the body itself or followed by corresponding numbers)
OG-Operational Group
OMON-Otryad Militsii Osobogo Naznacheniya (Russian CT)
OSS-Office of Strategic Services
PAVN-People's Army of Vietnam
PFP-People's First Party
PGM-Precision Guided Munition
PLA-People's Liberation Army
PLAAF-PLA Air Force
PLAN-PLA Navy
PLASF-PLA Special Forces
POE-Pocket Of Excellence
PRC-People's Republic of China
PSYOPS-Psychological Operations
ROC-Republic Of China
ROK-Republic Of Korea
SAR-Search And Rescue or Special Amphibious Reconnaissance
SBU-Special Boat Unit (followed by corresponding numbers)
SEAL-SEa Air and Land (followed by corresponding numbers)
SF-Special Forces
SFOD-D-Special Forces Operational Detachment Delta
SOAR-Special Operations Aviation Regiment
SOG-Studies and Observations Group
SO/LIC-Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict
SOF-Special Operations Force

SPETSNAZ-SPETSialnoje NAZnachenie (Russian SF)
SR-Special Reconnaissance
TEL-Transporter Erector Launcher
UAV-Unmanned aerial Vehicle
UDT-Underwater Demolition Team (followed by corresponding numbers)
UN-United Nations
US-United States
USSOCOM-United States Special Operations Command
USSR-Union Of Soviet Socialist Republics
UW-Unconventional Warfare
WIG-Wing In Ground
WTO-World Trade Organization

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. SOF AT A GLANCE

To mention the phrase ‘special operations forces’ within earshot of most citizens of the modern industrial world will immediately bring widely diverse names and national affiliations to mind: American Navy SEAL Platoons and Army Special Forces Groups; German Kommando Spezialkraefte (KSK) Units; British Special Boat Service Squadrons and Special Air Service Regiments; Russian SPETSNAZ Companies and OMON Units; South African Special Forces Brigades; South Korean Marines; Brazilian GRUMEC Groups; Singaporean Commando Battalions; Swiss Canton Tactical Units. (Yes, even tiny, perpetually neutral Switzerland owns a SOF unit.)

The nationalities, capabilities and missions of the individual forces may vary depending on the wealth and national strategies of the individual countries but the visual image and understanding of dedicated SOF remains predictably uniform. Dedicated SOF usually operate in relatively small units that can achieve with a few what conventional forces might not be able or willing with many (1); dedicated SOF are composed of highly-trained, skilled and motivated operators who underwent grueling ‘rights of passage’ to gain admission into their particular units and often operate without the benefits of external support; dedicated SOF usually get the best most high-tech equipment and weapons that their countries can offer, but are fully capable of working the low-tech end of the spectrum; dedicated SOF operators are physically, mentally and spiritually tougher than most and are assigned the most difficult and dangerous missions to accomplish, often within enemy-controlled territory, so are usually considered the ‘elite’ of their respective military services (2).

B. WHY PLA SOF?

Like some countries that have developed dedicated SOF units, China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has a tradition in successful special operations warfare. This tradition dates back to the Chinese struggle against Japanese forces during the 1930s and

Second World War. These operations were conducted by ordinary soldiers who had been formed into temporary composite units, given specialized training and tasking and sent on specific missions, after which they'd return to their original units (3). Disregarding the temporary nature of these units, their missions still covered the gamut of special operations tasking (long-range penetrations, tactical reconnaissance, raids on vital enemy positions, prisoner rescue). The introduction of dedicated SOF units within the Chinese military structure is a relatively recent development, the first experimental unit established in the Guangzhou military region in 1988s to implement the idea of providing "special mission rapid reaction" capabilities to the PLA's existing Rapid Reaction Forces (4).

So, what happened? Why did the PLA decide at that point in history that it required the services of a dedicated group of soldiers whose primary charter was to conduct special operations tasking on a full-time basis during times of peace and war? The PRC's decision to create and develop these kind of forces, a sort that had never been within the ranks of the PLA until then, did not just come out of the clear blue sky or on a whimsy. SOF personnel and units are difficult to build and require an investment in time, work and capital that cannot be viewed lightly. The screening process to find the kinds of individuals of suitable physical, mental and spiritual character to even begin the weeding-out process is thorough and extensive. Initial training alone eliminates the weaker candidates and can encompass several years, after which the soldier continues on to more advanced job specific training and must be prepared to assume an extremely rigorous operational tempo. Members of the United States' dedicated SOF units, Army Special Forces, Navy SEALs and the like, might have to volunteer several times and wait several years for acceptance to begin initial training. Washout rates among the selected candidates run anywhere from 70-90 percent. According to Chuck Pfarrer, a graduate of BUD/S Class 114 and former member of SEAL Teams 4 and 6, some BUD/S classes graduated nobody (5).¹ Initial training alone can run from 16 to 18 months and cost upwards of US \$300,000, after which a soldier moves into an operational unit and undergoes more advanced and expensive training. From the beginning date of initial

¹ Basic Underwater Demolition SEAL training: initial instruction for SEAL candidates.

training, turning out an effective SOF team member, requires between 5 and 8 years of training and operational experience, during which time the team member is usually “on the road,” either on a training or real world evolution.² These are but a few normal issues, let alone the larger ones of political and doctrinal inclination, financial ability and strategic necessity, that any state must routinely tackle in order to create and develop dedicated SOF forces.

To discern some idea as to what the PRC intends and why it believes that it needs dedicated SOF contingents when it had previously made do with well-trained temporaries requires a knowledge of what kinds of events and changes were going on in China and the world to inspire an adjustment in the PLA force structure. What domestic historical and political lessons had the PRC and PLA learned during the preceding decades that would cause them to change their own perspectives and lead them towards viewing dedicated SOF units as beneficial? What had happened, was happening, on a global scale that the PRC and PLA could observe, analyze and turn into additional positive lessons that would influence them to create and develop their first dedicated SOF contingents? What had to change doctrinally, militarily and politically within the PRC and PLA to develop the sort of atmosphere in which dedicated SOF units could emerge and thrive within their armed forces and state? What exactly did, rather does, the PRC seek to achieve as a nation that it would even entertain the thought of creating and developing dedicated SOF contingents.

What can SOF do for the United States? Dedicated American SOF units perform a wide range of missions which fit within several primary mission areas (6):

Direct Action (DA)-A SOF principal mission involving short-duration strikes and other small-scale offensive actions by SOF to seize, destroy, capture, recover or inflict damage on designated personnel or materiel.

Special Reconnaissance (SR)-A SOF principal mission involving reconnaissance and surveillance actions conducted by SOF to obtain or verify, by visual observation or other collection methods, information concerning the capabilities, intentions and activities of an actual or

² Opinions voiced by Army Special Forces officers, SO3880 (History of Special Operations), Naval Postgraduate School.

potential enemy or to secure data concerning the meteorological, hydrographic or geographic characteristics of a particular area.

Foreign Internal Defense (FID)-A principal SOF mission involving participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government to free and protect its society from lawlessness, subversion and insurgency.

Unconventional Warfare (UW)-A SOF principal mission involving a broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, normally of long-duration, predominately conducted by indigenous or surrogate forces who are organized, trained, equipped, supported and directed in varying degrees by an external source.

Counter-Terrorism (CT)-Offensive measures to prevent, deter and respond to terrorism.

Counter-Proliferation (CP)-A SOF principal mission which refers to the activities of the Department Of Defense across the full range of government efforts to combat proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).

Civil Affairs (CA)-A SOF principal mission involving advising and assisting commanders in establishing, maintaining, influencing or exploiting relations between military forces and civil authorities, both governmental and nongovernmental, and the civilian population in a friendly, neutral or hostile area of operation in order to facilitate military operations and consolidate operational objectives.

Psychological Operations (PSYOPS)-A SOF principal mission involving planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups and individuals.

Information Warfare (IW)-A SOF principal mission involving actions taken to achieve information superiority by affecting adversary information, information-based process, information systems and computer-based networks while defending one's own similar assets.

The United States' dedicated SOF capabilities are offensive and expeditionary in nature and, more importantly, constitute a power projection capability for one that would use them. In 1997, 2,000-3,000 American SOF personnel were deployed on 150 missions in 60-70 countries around the globe per week (7). In light of the current Global War On Terrorism and the Bush Administration's efforts to beef up the size and strength of the military's SOF contingents, that number is probably, quite naturally, higher.

There appear to have been three primary drivers behind the creation and development of dedicated SOF within the PLA, an armed force that prior to 1988 had no strategic use or political desire for such units or soldiers. The first driver was a profound doctrinal shift during the 1980s that changed the fundamental nature of how China perceived the future of warfare. The doctrine of People's War and its emphasis on defense and fighting large-scale long-duration manpower-intensive wars within Chinese borders gave way to Local Limited War and its outward looking, more offensive and technologically-centered perspective. The second driver was the modernization and professionalization of the PLA, inspired and accelerated by China's disastrous 'punitive war' against Vietnam in 1979. The PRC and PLA had reached a tacit understanding that such a humiliation at the hands of a smaller but more modern and professional force most likely meant defeat against their primary adversaries at the time: the former Soviet Union. The third driver was the First Gulf War in 1991 and the lessons and observations taken away by the PLA regarding the Coalition's success in it. The doctrine of Local Limited War was upgraded to Local War Under High Tech Conditions to address the dominance of American technology in every facet of the conflict and to emulate it on a smaller scale within select units of the PLA. The creation and development of a dedicated PLA SOF capability got a boost from the First Gulf War. As a result PLA SOF contingents emulate American dedicated SOF units in many regards, particularly in the emphasis on using high-technology gear to give itself a qualitative advantage over its adversaries.

C. PLA SOF AND UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE

A fundamental area in which PLA SOF organizations differ from the American ones that they tended to emulate is in the overarching mission area of Unconventional Warfare. Regardless of their superb Direct Action and Special Reconnaissance capabilities, American SOF, the United States Army Special Forces in particular, claim Unconventional Warfare as their primary *raison d'être* (8). Why not the PLA? The Chinese armed forces are certainly capable of developing a UW capability. The PRC's attempts to export of Communism and Communist insurgencies in Asia, and Mao's first two stages of People's War are straight UW campaigns, the former external and the latter

domestic. What is it about the PRC's political and strategic inclinations and the PLA's contemporary doctrinal bent that do not foster or encourage the creation and development of a concerted UW capability within the Chinese armed forces, let alone their SOF contingents? Is this a foregone conclusion?

This thesis argues that UW is a doctrinally unnecessary capability for the current PLA and a politically unattractive option for the PRC because of two factors. First, Local War Under High Tech Conditions emphasizes a violent, lightning-fast regional conflict that is over in a short amount of time; PLA SOF units are tailored to fit within that doctrine, focusing their efforts on DA and SR (9) mission capabilities and the ability to strike hard and fast in support of the current military doctrine and PRC power projection objectives. UW has a wholly contrary bent, emphasizing long-duration operations, often in enemy territory, while using friendly host populations as surrogate forces (US and PRC in Vietnam). Second, a PLA SOF UW capability is unnecessary to the objectives the PRC wants to achieve in the Asia region. It does not want to export Communism or inspire and support Communist insurrections within others' borders any longer, but build economic interdependence with its neighbors (10) as a means of reducing the possibility of armed conflict while enriching itself and achieving dominance in the region. An integral UW capability is an ill fit where intraregional political and economic tools, not external military adventures, seem to give the PRC influence and power.

This thesis first approaches the creation and development of dedicated PLA SOF as an environmental evolution, fostering the kind of atmosphere in which a dedicated SOF capability could actually emerge within the PLA military structure. It discusses the history and concept of People's War, the modernization and professionalization of the PLA, the doctrinal shift to Local Limited War and how the three factors interacted during a time of major historical change to bring about an environment in which dedicated PLA SOF contingents could emerge. Next, the thesis discusses the First Gulf War, how it helped modify Local Limited War to Local War Under High Tech Conditions and the PLA SOF units/capabilities that were created and

developed afterwards. Lastly, this thesis discusses PRC intentions, where PLA SOF fit into them, and the potential for the creation and development of an American SOF-type UW capability within PLA SOF.

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II. DOCTRINAL SHIFTS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON PLA SOF

Before delving into the subject of Special operations Forces (SOF) within the Chinese military, it is important to examine the background and evolution of twentieth century Chinese military development and doctrine. This examination will attempt to uncover the elements involved in and important to creating an atmosphere in the Chinese military where the creation of dedicated PLA SOF units were considered viable components of Chinese doctrinal thought and valuable assets to the Chinese war machine and state.

A. PEOPLE WAR AND THE DEFENSIVE MINDSET

People's War was nothing new to the PLA. The Maoist-devised and inspired strategy of garnering the collective power of the Chinese state, primarily its rural peasants, had its true genesis during the late 1920's when the communist forces first clashed swords against the Chinese Nationalists, led by Chiang Kai-Shek and the Republic Of China (ROC) regime (11). Whenever People's War has emerged as the primary Chinese warfighting strategy it has always been a defensive reflex tied to China's collective perception of weakness in comparison to its real or potential aggressors and, if not besieged by, then under threat from these seemingly more powerful foes (12).

People's war as advocated by Mao would occur in three distinct phases. The defensive phase entailed a retreat by the PLA into the country's interior and a mass mobilization of the state's population and resources to resist the invaders. A vigorous popular guerrilla campaign would also emerge to harass the enemy forces every step of the way. Using sabotage, hit-and-run attacks and the comfort and goodwill of the local population, the guerrillas would avoid pitched battles with the more powerful enemy forces while gradually chipping away at their will to continue the fight. The stalemate phase would occur when the enemy could advance no further into the interior and had actually begun to consolidate their positions, even going over to the defensive themselves

in an attempt to maintain their positions. Conversely, the PLA and guerrilla forces would have grown strong enough themselves to hold the invaders at bay, while still avoiding large, potentially negatively decisive battles, continuing to wear down the invader's will to continue fighting, and marshalling their own forces for the third and final phase of People's War. The counterattack, the third and last phase of People's War, would occur when the PLA and guerrilla forces had grown in sufficient military and political (popular) strength that they could convert to the conventional attack and take on the invading forces with a reasonable chance of success. Ideally, the invaders would be defeated in a single or a series of decisive battles and completely driven from Chinese soil (13).

The intervening periods of Japanese occupation and world war, if anything, seemed to strengthen the viability and validity of Mao's strategy. The Chinese military had been handily defeated by the more organized and westernized Japanese forces and its government forced to flee. Despite the rivalry between Mao's Communists and Chiang's Nationalists, both parties readily agreed that they would need to unite to defeat and eventually expel the Japanese invaders. Neither Communist nor Nationalist had any illusions about China's overt military inferiority to the Japanese, so guerrilla warfare emerged as a simple matter of course as the only realistic choice of effective strategies in which to defend their beleaguered nation. The Japanese were obvious and unabashedly brutal invaders, yet somehow attempted to control the occupied territories through a system of Japanese-friendly 'puppet' governments, which were already unpopular to the Chinese people. The Japanese refusal to deal with either the Communists or Nationalists made their situation in China worse.

Under the tenets of People's War, what remained of the army and the masses were organized into guerrilla forces that would, with Allied assistance (14), chip away at the Japanese military's initially superior military power. Through sabotage and hit-and-run skirmishes, the guerrilla attacks weakened the Japanese army, forcing them to disperse to deal with the phantom attacks, while denying them any opportunity to catch them in large numbers and crush them in detail. The constant harassment was designed to wear out the enemy, sap its will to resist and continue while providing the guerillas a converse opportunity to garner support with the population and grow in numbers and

strength. The conclusion of China's People's War against Japan came when the enemy had been defeated and forced to not only relinquish the territories it had conquered and occupied, but withdraw from the mainland. People's War had worked in collusion with superior Allied military power to defeat the Japanese in 1945, and it was also a handy strategy for the communists against their Nationalist opponents during the resumption of civil warfare from 1945 until 1949. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was able to garner support from the peasant masses and create guerilla armies to fight its Nationalist opponents. This was probably not a particularly hard sell for the majority of the Chinese peasantry. They had lived in poverty under Chiang Kia-Shek's corrupt government and European colonial powers before the horror of the Japanese occupation. They were looking at more of the same should Chiang and the Chinese Nationalists win the civil war against the communists, but this time with the backing of the Soviet Union or United States (15). Mao invoked the memory of European colonial rule, Japanese occupation, and Chiang's corrupt administration and offered what seemed an attractive alternative system of government that promised equality and an opportunity to rise above one's station in life. The communists de-legitimized Chiang's and the Nationalist's claims to the Chinese government in the eyes of the masses. Under Mao's leadership, the communist forces grew in size and strength and ultimately defeated the Nationalists, forcing them and Chiang into exile on the island of Taiwan while establishing the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the mainland.

With the financial, military and technical assistance of the Soviet Union, the PRC attempted to modernize during the 1950s. It was already well on its way to doing so. The economy was beginning a slow transition away from its agrarian base and towards industrialization. The vast peasant guerrilla forces were being organized and equipped on modern Soviet lines to fight a high-tech European-style war in Asia (16). China even had a nascent nuclear program afoot. The entire Soviet-sponsored modernization effort came to a screeching halt in 1959 when the Soviet Union pulled its support. The infrastructural groundwork for a modern China had been laid but not yet solidified, forcing the PRC to fall back on what it knew best and had in abundance: people. Isolated from the world's

expanding, lucrative and increasingly interconnected economic systems and forced to go it alone, the PRC under Mao stressed 'self-reliance' and enforced the state's isolation from the rest of the world.

The PRC simultaneously attempted to cultivate liaisons and garner influence with weaker Third-World states not in the American or Soviet orbits, portraying themselves as champions and protectors of Third-World development and well-being, and as an alternative to allying with either of the two superpowers (17). In the absence of modern assistance and with the Soviet Union and United States as potential enemies, Chinese military self-reliance meant a return to People's War and the defensive-minded perception of being threatened by much stronger rivals. With the United States and Soviet Union perceived as its primary opponents, China would still rely on its peasant masses, plus the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and limited modern equipment (tanks, aircraft, naval vessels), to fight its enemies. They would vacate the urban areas and fall back to the industrial and support centers in the country's interior, drawing in their opponents into favorable situations in which they would be harassed and slowly worn down by guerrilla and regular PLA forces. When both had grown numerous and strong enough to strike back with enough power, they would defeat and expel the invaders, as Soviet Russia had in 1941-1945 (18). People's War remained the PRC's primary national military doctrine from its reinstitution in the late 1950s until the middle 1980s. There was very little variation from its thrust or direction, save a slight name change in 1978 to People's War Under Modern Conditions, which reflected China's previous Soviet-assisted efforts at modernization and its possession of nuclear weapons since 1964 (19).

Maoist-inspired People's War was as much a political tool as it was a national military strategy, and the appearance, composition and training of the PLA bore this out. The vast majority of its fighting power revolved around massive numbers of soldiers. The bulk of the PLA's manpower lay in China's peasant masses. Their military training was difficult and thorough but firmly based on 19th century notions of the battlefield dominance of infantry rather than addressing the increasing complexity and technological realities of modern warfare. The withdrawal of Soviet assistance left the PLA bereft of a modern technological base; it was stuck with what it had obtained prior to the Soviet

pullout. It had to make do for the next two decades as indicated by the current preponderance of 1950s and 1960s technology within its gradually modernizing armed forces.

The PLA was stuck with the sole military resources it possessed in abundance: people and geopolitical space. Political training and indoctrination of this mass army was also extremely thorough and in fact often given a higher priority than traditional military skills. Political indoctrination sessions occurred up to three times a day within the PLA and might consume 30 to 40 percent of a soldier's time (20). Political Commissars held equal rank and authority to military commanders and had the power to overrule military decisions for political considerations. Soldiers were promoted and demoted within the PLA based largely on political standing and reliability rather than tactical and technical proficiency. Even the lack of visible rank insignia in PLA uniforms after 1965 and the designation of soldiers as either "fighters" or "commanders" was an indication of how great an emphasis was placed on political reliability within the PLA's ranks at the expense of tactical and technical acumen. The politicization of the military and de-emphasis of the professional aspects of soldiering were primarily a control mechanism to ensure the PLA's loyalty to Chinese Communist Party, a throwback to the 1950's when the Party feared it would lose control of the military if it became a professional force along Soviet lines.

People's War may have been a purely defensive military strategy that mirrored China's concerns about threats from invasion, but it embodied some important aspects of contemporary SOF missions in its bent towards Unconventional Warfare as defined by Thomas K. Adams (21).

- 1) People's War did not seek to defeat or destroy conventional enemy forces outright but through a carefully cultivated domestic resistance campaign that garnered mass support for the fighters and subverted the cause of the enemy forces.
- 2) People's War relied on capitalizing on a resistance force's strengths and capabilities rather than its weaknesses and shortcomings when compared to invading conventional enemy forces.

- 3) People's War was a nominally military strategy that eventually sought to crush enemy forces in the field, but achieved ultimately political results in that it sought to grind away an enemy's commitment and will to continue hostilities.

Because of the defensive and political orientation of the People's War doctrine, the creation of a dedicated SOF contingent within the PLA would have been very difficult if not impossible. Standing SOF units, particularly those of the United States, are primarily offensive in nature. Their full time charter is to provide a ready force, peacetime or wartime, capable of infiltrating and attacking the enemy where it feels most secure. Modern SOF units are power projection tools, operating either in support of larger conventional military initiatives or national strategic objectives. Standing SOF units enjoy a level of institutional autonomy not present in conventional forces and require soldiers who are independent-minded, professional, tactically and technically adept and fully dedicated to mastering their trade. Consequently, the PRC didn't need a standing offensive force of potentially dangerous "free-thinkers" in the PLA. It wanted to maintain control of the PLA and it wanted a military force that was heavily indoctrinated politically and utterly loyal to the Party. The PLA was no stranger to special operations. Selected soldiers drawn from line units were brought together and given special training for specific missions. They would infiltrate to the target, often dressed in civilian clothes, conduct the mission, then return to their parent units (22). According to a propaganda piece written by a Hong Kong journalist privy to an operation in 1997:

China has a long special forces history. During the Red Army era, we had the crack "Pistol Teams." During the War of Resistance Against Japan, our "Rear Area Armed Working Teams" made an impressive showing. And in the Korean War, Chinese special forces blew up key U.S. military bridges, disrupting the whole U.S. military battle formation. The most famous was a surprise attack by Chinese special forces on South Korea's most crack capital division, the White Tiger Regiment HQ, which made the decisive contribution to China's smashing of the White Tiger Regiment (23).

Prior to the modernization/professionalization of the PLA and doctrinal shift to the more offensive and outward-looking Local Limited War, dedicated, professional PLA SOF were an unwelcome hazard to the PRC.

B. MODERNIZATION AND PROFESSIONALIZATION

There are two primary influences, the Four Modernizations and the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War, responsible for setting the PLA on the road towards modernization and professionalization. Following Mao Zedong's death and the ouster of his weaker immediate successor, Hua Guofeng, who sought to keep the PRC on a less progressive Maoist path (24), the PRC's new leader Deng Xiaoping, was free to pursue causes that he had championed since the 1950s and implement these causes into policies.³ Chairman Deng was a pragmatic man and a forward thinker who did not want his country to fall any further behind the rest of the developing world than it already had. He emphasized changing the PRC's outlook on the world and his country's place in it, comparing China's self-imposed isolation from the rest of the world as "national suicide" (25). Deng was also determined to bring China out of its primitive existence; the Four Modernizations was a policy that detailed the broad areas that the PRC sought to develop in pursuit of that goal. Military modernization was the fourth and last priority behind the development of agriculture, industry and science and technology, as the Party leadership believed that greater priority on military modernization would hurt China's efforts to strengthen itself economically (26). Nevertheless, military modernization was a key component of the Four Modernizations policy and was supported by both civilian and military leadership, particularly after Deng Xiaoping consolidated his power by becoming Chairman of the Party Central Military Commission (CMC) in 1981.

The 1979 Sino-Vietnamese border war was only sixteen days long but revealed specific and glaring shortcomings in the PLA's military capabilities, giving additional impetus for the fledgling military modernization effort. The war was "punitive" in nature, devised to teach the Vietnamese a lesson for having invaded Cambodia in December 1978 (27). The PLA's largest military operation since the Korean War, it was completely against contemporary PLA doctrine. It was a limited, offensive, ground-force campaign and a monumental disaster for the PLA, although China claimed victory (28).

³ Deng Xiaoping had always been an advocate of state-strengthening economic reforms, a stance that placed him at odds with Mao and caused him to lose his job in the CCP twice in less than twenty years. Deng sums up his position when he says, "It matters not whether the cat is white or black, only that it catches mice."

The war was a military and political humiliation for the PRC. Although the numerically superior Chinese forces penetrated about fifty kilometers into Vietnam, the much more professional and experienced People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), still flush from their struggle against the United States and equipped with modern Soviet and American gear, made the PLA pay dearly. The PLA deployed 180,000 soldiers from its best front-line units to the war and sustained heavy casualties: approximately 60,000, including 26,000 dead (29). The PLA fought against a smaller, numerically weaker opponent--75,000-100,000 PAVN border guards and militia; the second stringers. Hanoi was, at the time, simultaneously engaged in a war with Cambodia.

The PLA's combat performance suffered from poor mobility, weak logistics, and obsolete weaponry. Inadequate communications, an unclear chain of command, and the lack of military ranks within the PLA also created confusion and adversely affected the PRC military's combat effectiveness. Worse, the PLA's poor showing against the PAVN left the Party and PLA leadership doubtful about the PLA's effectiveness and utility against much more modern and powerful potential opponents, particularly the Soviet Union and United States, both of which were perceived by the communist leadership as the PRC's primary adversaries.

The military modernization program begun in the late 1970s had three major focuses. First, the military withdrew from civilian politics and, for the most part, resumed its pre-Cultural Revolution political neutrality (30). Deng reestablished civilian control over the military by placing his supporters to key military leadership positions, minimizing the scope of the PLA's domestic nonmilitary role, and by revitalizing the party political structure and ideological control system within the PLA.

Second, modernization required the reform of military organization, doctrine, education and training, and personnel policies to improve combat effectiveness in combined-arms warfare. Organizational reforms included creating the state Central Military Commission in 1982, streamlining and reducing superfluous PLA forces, reorganizing the military regions from eleven to seven, forming group armies, and enacting the new Military Service Law in 1984.

Doctrine, strategy, and tactics were revised under the rubric of “People's War Under Modern Conditions,” which now envisioned a forward defense at selected locations near China's borders to prevent attack on Chinese cities and industrial sites, and emphasized combined-arms warfare. Reforms in education and training emphasized improving the military skills and raising the education levels of officers and enlisted soldiers towards the goal of conducting effective modern combined-arms operations. New personnel policies required upgrading the quality of PLA recruits and officer candidates, improving conditions of service, changing promotion practices to stress tactical and technical proficiency instead of political acceptability and reliability, and providing new uniforms and insignia.

The third focus of military modernization was the transformation of the PRC defense establishment into a system capable of independently maintaining a modern military force. As military expenditures remained relatively constant, reforms emphasized reorganizing the defense research-and-development and industrial base to more closely integrate civilian and military science, technology and industry. Foreign technology was used selectively to upgrade weapons and military equipment. Defense industry reforms also helped bring the PRC into the international arms market and spurred increased production of civilian goods by defense industries. The overall scale of PLA economic activities was minimized, but the military continued to participate in infrastructure development projects, and even started a program to provide demobilized soldiers with skills useful in the civilian economy. The end goal of PLA modernization and professionalization efforts was to create a smaller but harder-hitting force, one that was tactically and technically proficient in the use of contemporary modern high-technology weaponry and equipment, and fully sustainable through indigenous means (local research/development/production and revenues generated through foreign sales). The creation and development of this more professional, “leaner and meaner” fighting force began to become a reality even as the parallel but higher-priority economic reforms set in motion by Chairman Deng began to bear fruit and the PRC grew wealthier and more able to afford the upgrades.

Currently, the PLA numbers 2.3 million men and women (1.6 million in the army alone) (31), down from a 1980s peak of 4 million, and commands nearly five percent of the PRC's GDP (approximately 68 billion USD)⁴. While the vast majority (65-80 percent) of PLA weaponry and equipment is of 1950s-1960s vintage, newer more modern gear has been issued to "core units" of the Chinese military (32) and will eventually, quite logically, find its way to other units as it becomes available.

The modernization and professionalization of the PLA was an essential step toward fostering an atmosphere in which dedicated PLA SOF units could emerge and evolve. As of the middle to late 1980s, PLA troop strength had decreased by approximately a million, but the soldiers were of a higher quality than a decade earlier. Military academies for officers and non-commissioned officers had been revived to train the PLA's leadership to command modern forces and as the basis of future promotions in the military (33). Basic military training occurred before rather than while soldiers arrived in operational units, and technical schools were revived to instruct the young enlisted soldiers how to operate and maintain modern hardware. The PLA began to regularly rehearse large combined arms operations with combat simulation equipment, including laser and electronic scoring devices. Political education was reduced in favor of military training; soldiers now spent 20% of their time with political indoctrination and 80% learning their trade (34). The reforms and de-politicization of the PLA was yielding professional, tactically and technically proficient soldiers who were trained to a degree previously unknown in the PLA.

Simultaneously, the creation and development of a more effective PLA--one that was envisioned by the PRC leadership as capable of challenging the Soviet Union or United States in combat--could not preclude the creation and development of a potentially more offensive role for these forces in support of the PRC's expanding strategic prerogatives in the East Asia region (35). A consequent change in the primary national military strategy and doctrine governing the PLA's conduct of warfare was not far behind.

⁴ Estimated FY 2003 figures from the CIA World Fact Book, <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ch.html#Military>, April 2005.

C. LIMITED LOCAL WAR

The doctrinal shift from People's war to Limited Local War in the mid 1980s was not a subtle one. It was impelled by the PLA's ongoing modernization and professionalization efforts that helped yield a more effective fighting force than had existed a decade previously, and by Chinese military analysts and CMC Chairman Deng Xiaoping's astute perceptions of the future nature of warfare and how such a future would affect the PLA's warfighting strategy. June 1985 was a particularly momentous occasion for the future of the PLA. During an extended meeting of the CCP's CMC, leaders and strategic thinkers were tasked to develop a unified vision on the future of warfare and establish the direction of consequent military strategies (36). Deng's concluding remarks were telling and reflected his perceptions of the direction he felt the PRC's military and strategy should go:

There will not be large-scale warfare in the foreseeable future. Factors preventing imminent and large-scale warfare are increasing; such factors are: (a) neither the Soviet Union nor the United States has achieved advantages in terms of military deployment and therefore prevent either side from making the first move; (b) the third world countries are not cooperating with these two powers in terms of military deployment, in fact, people in the third world countries support peace more than war; (c) the importance of technological advantage and sustaining economic competition have replaced the importance of sustaining war-winning military capability and becoming new contested terrain in world competition (37).

Deng's remarks reflected the musings of the PRC's analysts and were influential in that they forced Chinese military thinkers to re-evaluate the thirty-year-old strategy of People's War and its scenarios involving large-scale, long-duration purely defensive-warfare within the Chinese interior during a period of general war. The Soviet Union and United States were still perceived as primary potential threats to the security of the PRC, more in the guise of global hegemons and competitors for regional influence than potential invaders. Deng Xiaoping and Chinese military analysts took their cues from the contemporary direction of the winds of history. The United States was viewed as being on the rise by PRC analysts. It had recently concluded a bloody war in Asia that was

regional in nature but had come back stronger than ever in the 1980s as reflected in its strong and growing economy, and seemingly inexorable military buildup under President Reagan (38).

The Soviet Union was simultaneously perceived as on the decline after its surge in national strength and prestige in the 1970s following the victory of Communism in its client state, Vietnam. Its planned economy was in a shambles and could not keep pace with the apparently endless spending of its primary adversary. Its seemingly formidable military was viewed by the PRC as a joke, a “paper tiger,” because of the messy regional war of its own making in Afghanistan, its own backyard. It was doing a poor job of defeating the “raggedy-assed” Mujahideen guerrillas because of the inherent difficulty in adjusting its massive conventional war effort to the vagaries of insurgent warfare, the soaring unpopularity of the conflict in the Soviet Union, and the economic drain of the war stemming from a fundamental inability of the communist economy to match that of its primary Cold war adversary, the United States (39).

The PRC perceived the world in a state of strategic stalemate. Neither superpower had achieved a decisive military advantage in numbers or technology, nuclear or conventional, to enable them to successfully attack the other first. Both superpowers possessed sufficient arsenals of nuclear weapons and means to deliver them to make any seeming quantitative or qualitative advantage a moot point. First Strike and Massive Retaliation were just euphemisms for mutual annihilation. The reigning superpowers could not attack each other with nuclear weapons and survive, and Soviet conventional power in Europe was expected to eventually be countered by American nuclear weapons (40).

The PRC took the view that the developed world had largely been divided up into American and Soviet camps but neither superpower was able to exercise sufficient influence over the *developing* world to give either antagonist the significant strategic advantage necessary to break the other. The proxy wars and shadow maneuverings carried out by both superpowers in the Third World cauldrons of Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia and the Middle East--all regions where the United States and Soviet Union jockeyed for influence in order to tip the strategic scales in their favor--had come

to naught, with neither side able to gain decisive footing in those regions and the Third World as a whole proving largely unsupportive of either alliance's cause. Most often the superpowers were played against each other for the benefit of those regions' individual states. This situation reflected a gradual and general lessening of superpower influence worldwide and further lessened the possibility of large-scale or global warfare, but opened the door to smaller, equally dangerous regional conflicts fueled by largely local tensions.

The PRC also perceived itself as a potential rising power in the region. It had finally achieved normalized diplomatic relations with the United States and much of the rest of the world. It was slowly transitioning to a market economy and beginning to reap the benefits of plugging into the massive global economic system. It was beginning to modernize its armed forces with Western equipment and technology while opening its doors to foreign investment (41). It believed that a period of relative peace was at hand, during which it could devote increasing time and resources to the national strengthening it had begun under Deng's leadership (42). The PRC was even taking advantage of its friendly liaisons with the dominant superpower to strike out at two of its own regional adversaries; it allowed the United States to establish surveillance posts on its Western border with the Soviet Union and was embroiled in an ugly regional war in Cambodia, covertly and overtly aiding Pol Pot's rebel troops which were fighting against the Vietnamese forces that had occupied the country since December 1978 (43).

The perceptions and observations of Deng and PRC analysts led them to several important conclusions that lead directly to the shift in doctrine from People's War to Local Limited War.

- 1) Large-scale warfare based solely on the defensive mindset and trading space for time within the Chinese interior in order to marshal people and resources for a popular war was no longer a viable or desirable strategy for the PRC or even a realistic possibility.
- 2) Technology and a thriving economy were of primary importance in the execution and success of a future war rather than devising a strategy based on a long-duration conflict.

- 3) Warfare, conventional or nuclear, between the superpowers and their allies was discounted as a virtual impossibility because of the strategic stalemate between them.
- 4) The lessening of superpower influence may have made the world safe from large-scale global wars, but created a new set of dangers in ethnically, economically and territorially provoked regional wars

The PRC was not immune from these regional wars it foresaw. In Xinjiang, Muslim Uighur separatists were perceived as serious threats to Chinese national security, as fundamentalists and separatists. Tibetan religious and pro-independence activists were giving Beijing fits. The simmering issue of Taiwan and whether diplomacy or war would reunite it with the mainland was still uppermost in the minds of PRC military and political leaders. People's War and the defensive mindset behind it would prove insufficient to fight the new crop of locally-fueled regional conflicts that the PRC perceived as the future of warfare (44).

Deng believed that a period of comparative and lasting global peace was, if not assured, then a good possibility in the near future. He believed that the PRC could use that peace to further strengthen the state economically and take advantage of the lucrative global economic system to boost China's prosperity and influence, and, by extension, its military power. In this context, Chinese military thinkers and strategists, with some prodding from Deng, began to examine and favor smaller-scale, shorter duration offensive operations conducted in China's periphery and regionally during a period of comparative peace and national prosperity.

Local Limited War was the emergent doctrine designed to fight future regional wars on China's peripheries. It signified a fundamental and not subtle shift in the Chinese military mindset away from wars of attrition within Chinese borders. Although described as "active" defense (45), it was in fact a more offensive doctrine than People's War, signaling a desire by the PRC to possess a power projection capability within a regional sphere of conflict. Local Limited War required that the PRC military be able to attack an enemy day or night, in all weather conditions during any season up to 600 miles from

Chinese borders and coastlines and even permitted pre-emptive surgical strikes against a potential adversary to destroy or forestall an attack on the state (46).

Local Limited War looked good in theory, but it could not be backed up in practice. It was a practical impossibility for the PLA when it was initially advanced. The doctrine required a plethora of combat capabilities that the PLA neither possessed nor could fiscally afford. The forces of the PLA were impressive on paper, but much of the hardware and technology was twenty to thirty years old and, as would later bear out during the First Gulf War, wholly inadequate against a determined adversary sporting the latest military equipment and technology. Strengthening the PRC economy was given the highest priority and it was growing, but not yet robust enough to invest in the types and quantity of high-tech tools necessary to make Local Limited War a viable doctrine for the PLA.

An interim power projection capability was required for the PRC military until it could develop, purchase or steal the equipment and technology to fully validate Local Limited War, and it found a relatively inexpensive solution in the creation and development of dedicated SOF. Comparing the relative cost of various tools in the United States' inventory of force projection capabilities against the cost of training and equipping an Army Special Forces soldier (Table.1; these are all "out-the-door" costs; maintenance, operations, crew and pay costs not included) it is clear that the PRC saw the cost-saving merits of SOF as an interim albeit limited force projection capability. In essence, the PRC was again sticking with what it knew best, taking advantage of a resource that it had in great abundance: manpower. The PRC had not the money, technology or qualified personnel (yet) to own and effectively employ the kinds of modern power projection gear that would validate Local Limited War. Until it did it could own a minimal but effective offensive regional power projection force without going broke. From among this better trained and more professional pool of soldiers the first dedicated PLA SOF unit was created in the Guangzhou Military Region in 1988.

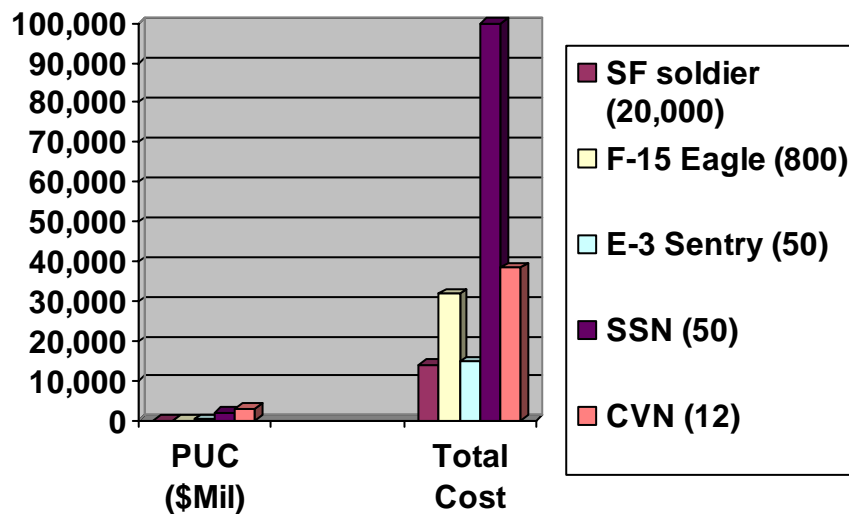


Table 1. Comparative costs of various power projection assets

D. CONCLUSION

Although the PLA was no stranger to special operations it had to go through severe doctrinal changes and a concerted modernization and professionalization effort to realize the creation and development of a dedicated SOF capability. Maoist-inspired People's War, the bulwark doctrine of the PRC and PLA for almost forty years, was a purely defensive strategy that accepted the inevitability of invasion by a more powerful enemy, lost territory and a lengthy war of attrition within the Chinese homeland in exchange for time and a final military and political victory in the end. It favored heavily politically indoctrinated soldiers over militarily adept ones, a condition that persisted until the late 1970s and did the PLA no favors regarding the potential creation of dedicated SOF units. As primarily offensive entities employing motivated professional soldiers, dedicated SOF creation and development within the PLA had to wait until the doctrinal and political climate changed.

Deng Xiaoping's reforms in the late 1970s were the spark that moved the PLA towards modernization and professionalization, but, because of the PRC's predominant focus on strengthening the economy, improvements in the PLA took a backseat. Only the utter humiliation of the Sino-Vietnam War gave military reforms, primarily

modernization and profesionalization, a higher priority than it had had before 1979. These modernization and professionalization efforts were the initial elements toward creating an atmosphere in which dedicated PLA SOF could emerge and develop.

Changes in the world climate and within the PRC--particularly the decline of the Soviet Union, rise of the United States, overall lessening of superpower influence worldwide (especially in the third world) and China's transition to a market economy--led Deng and PRC analysts to correctly surmise that future conflicts would revolve around local tensions within a regional context and be won on the strength of technology and economic vigor. The PRC's attempt to address the future emergence of these regional conflicts lead to a fundamental doctrinal shift away from the purely defensive represented by People's War and toward a more offensive stance as postulated by Limited Local War. Because Limited Local War required the projection of power at a considerable distance beyond China's own borders and coastline, and the PRC had not the money, equipment or technological base to back the doctrine, it fell back on a relatively cost-effective manpower solution, dedicated SOF units, as an interim though limited force projection tool.

The creation of the experimental dedicated SOF unit in the Guangzhou Military Region was certainly a start, but hardly enough. The First Gulf War was an ugly lesson to the PRC as to how far its military machine had to go to catch up to the rest of the modern world. As the Sino-Vietnamese war had forced the PLA into a serious modernization and professionalization effort, the First Gulf War had the same effect on dedicated PLA SOF creation and development.

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III. THE FIRST GULF WAR AND PLA SOF

If the Sino-Vietnamese War was a humiliating lesson for the PLA in “what was,” the First Gulf War was equally embarrassing and every bit as instructive in “what could be.” The experiences and lessons from China’s 1979 debacle with its Southeast Asian neighbor galvanized the PRC into assigning a greater priority to the modernization and professionalization of its military forces and created the appropriate military and political conditions for the eventual creation of dedicated PLA SOF. In a like manner, the lessons and observations PLA analysts took away from the First Gulf War were essential to spurring the creation, development and expansion of PLA SOF units and shaping the trajectory of their development, especially regarding specific capabilities the PLA thought that they should have.

A. CREATION OF PLA SOF

The genesis of PLA SOF in 1988 occurred at a critical juncture in PRC history. Economically, the nation was beginning to reap the benefits of a market economy; it was looking outward instead of inward and had a military strategy to match, one that emphasized war beyond China’s national boundaries, though it had not yet acquired the hardware or infrastructure to back it up. The ongoing professionalization of the PLA was developing different soldiers than those under Mao, ones that were tactically and technically proficient and rewarded for being so instead of PRC-friendly, politically reliable cannon fodder.

The PLA was also in the unique position of being able to learn from the experiences of its primary adversaries. Both American and Soviet modern SOF forces had initially been designed, created and developed to support large-scale conventional operations. American SOF were tasked with cultivating guerrilla forces behind enemy lines in the event of a Soviet attack on Europe, conducting raids on vital targets and reconnoitering/clearing beaches for amphibious landings. Soviet SOF units were detailed primarily to seek and destroy American tactical nuclear launch and C2 facilities in Europe in prelude to a Soviet conventional attack (47). Both American and Soviet SOF

eventually found use as alternatives to utilizing conventional forces to fight low-intensity, regional or 'small' wars. American SOF came into its own in the low-intensity regional conflict role during the Vietnam War, training indigenous peoples to resist the Viet Cong and PAVN while launching lightning-fast raids and ambushes against enemy lines of communication and supply. The American SOF community continued its legacy during follow-on conflicts in Latin America, where they were wildly successful in the 1980s, particularly in El Salvador and Honduras where they helped both states stave off Communist insurgencies (48). Soviet SOF blossomed in the low-intensity conflict role in a similar manner. The Soviet Union sent SPETSNAZ advisors to Angola and South Africa during the 1970s and 80s to train and support Communist guerrillas in those states, and deployed SOF teams to Afghanistan to counter the deadly Mujahideen fighters wreaking havoc on their conventional forces (49).

With the lessons of foreign SOF to follow and similar capabilities in mind, the first experimental *dedicated* Special Operations Force (SOF), a unit of specially selected soldiers that were trained to conduct special operations tasking on a full-time basis during times of national peace or war, was created in the Guangzhou Military Region in 1988. This SOF unit was designed and trained to support the contemporary doctrine of Local Limited War by serving as a limited and relatively inexpensive alternative to modern high-tech force projection tools that the PRC did not have at the time. The long-range fighter-bombers, aerial refueling tankers, precision land and sea attack missiles, modern C4ISR and aircraft carriers....all were prohibitively expensive for a 1980s PRC making its first tentative steps into a market economy and towards economic prosperity. All would have to wait (but not much longer) until the PRC was economically strong enough to afford them in quantity and the crews had been trained to operate them.

B. THE FIRST GULF WAR AND LOCAL WAR UNDER HIGH TECH CONDITIONS

The First Gulf War added another layer, the emphasis on a high-technology combat capability, to the doctrine and strategy of Local Limited War and shaped the trajectory of development that PLA SOF would assume in the future. The PLA studied

the United State's First Gulf War and found the lessons educational if disturbing. The large Iraqi armed forces, a major recipient of PRC military assistance and its largely outmoded hardware (50), had been handily destroyed in sixty days by the Coalition's high-tech forces that had been massed in the Persian Gulf and launched blitzkrieg-style against Iraq and enemy targets in Kuwait. It was brutally apparent in to the PRC and PLA in 1985 that their six-year-old doctrine of Local Limited War could not be supported by their current equipment inventory of 1950s and 1960s hardware (51). It would likely prove ineffective against a determined high-technology adversary, a fact driven home by the relative ease with which the American-led Coalition force's high-technology war machine ground down the Chinese-equipped Iraqi armed forces.

The PRC had a brace of regional high-tech and semi high-tech states with which to potentially contend. Russia was an economic disaster, but its war machine was second only to that of the United States in technological development, training and potency. Taiwan and South Korea were economically prosperous and armed to the teeth with the best gear that the United States could provide, and their troops well trained and motivated (52). Japan's small "self-defense" forces were also equipped with modern American military hardware and the requisite skills to use them effectively. India, Pakistan and the Southeast Asian states were all in the midst of modernizing their own forces as quickly as their respective economies would permit.

Study of the First Gulf War lead PRC and PLA analysts to several important conclusions:

- 1) Advanced technology was an essential key in the strategic and tactical success of any war that the PRC might fight. Technology allowed the Coalition forces to effectively attack the Iraqi military day or night, in all weather conditions regardless of the time of year, and in any environmental or terrain condition (53). Laser, infrared and electro-optically steered precision-guided munitions launched from airborne, seaborne and even land-based platforms increased Coalition weapon delivery accuracy against point Iraqi targets while decreasing collateral damage. Stealth aircraft penetrated Iraqi air defenses under cover of darkness and a cloak of electronic invisibility with relative impunity to accurately bomb key

- Iraqi C2 targets. Coalition armored vehicles equipped with global positioning system receivers navigated the open desert where the Iraqi army feared to tread, and destroyed Soviet-made Iraqi T-72s and Chinese-built T-55s with long-range wire and laser guided missiles and depleted-uranium ordnance. Advanced air and space-based C2 systems gave Coalition forces an accurate picture of the battlespace to more effectively locate and dispatch their adversaries.
- 2) Short, sharp regional wars like the First Gulf War were useful to achieving political ends while rendering large-scale warfare unnecessary. The United State's influence and power were enhanced at home and abroad, even among Arab nations, by seeking a global Coalition against Iraq. By abiding by the letter of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 660 and 678, (54) which stipulated only that Iraqi forces be ejected from Kuwait and 'peace be restored to the region'--even though some American military leaders wanted to push on into Iraq and take Baghdad--the war was confined to the immediate region, and did not threaten to spill over and involve "hostile" Arab nations or Iraq's other primary patron, the Soviet Union. It also ensured that the rare and fragile alliance that had been brokered among several Arab states in direct support of the war (even Syria sent troops) would be maintained (55), lending an additional air of legitimacy to the war and further reducing its possibility of escalating beyond the immediate region.
 - 3) High-tech warfare offered the possibility of bringing conflicts to a rapid conclusion. Coalition forces ruthlessly exercised Information Warfare (IW) dominance over the enemy, rapidly snuffing its C2 system with precision attacks one target at a time until the Iraqi military was left blind, deaf and without effective command and control of its forces. The overall faster pace and relentlessness of Coalition kinetic operations took the Iraqis by surprise. Attacks on infrastructure and battlefield targets occurred around the clock regardless of weather conditions, quickly reducing the Iraqi war machine until only the shaken remnants were left to surrender four days following the opening of the ground campaign--sixty days after hostilities began.

The First Gulf War more than anything else drove home the reality of the strategic pickle in which the PLA found itself. If the United States and its allies could reduce the large, Chinese-equipped Iraqi military to scrap in two furious months with relative ease and few casualties, it could potentially do the same to the PLA should the strategic or political need arise. The PRC's numerical superiority in troops and equipment might even prove negligible or, worse, inadequate against the more technologically-developed armed forces of its regional competitors in the event of a conflict with them. The lessons of the First Gulf War influenced the PRC and PLA to again modify military doctrine and strategy to Local War Under High-Tech Conditions. Under the new doctrine, the technological development of the PLA assumed a renewed importance. Russia and Israel supplied much of the equipment and technology to the PLA, as did, prior to the post-Tiananmen Square arms embargo, Europe and the United States. Under Local War Under High-Tech Conditions, high-tech combat power was concentrated in core PLA units. These core units, which Western observers called "pockets of excellence" (POEs), received the best equipment, technology and training to provide the PLA with local superiority over its enemies within a relatively small war zone in order to overwhelm its adversaries and resolve regional conflicts quickly. More importantly, this new doctrine was a tacit acknowledgement by the PLA of its desire to make itself into a modern high-tech force and its relative inferiority as a whole when compared to its potential competitors (56).

The PRC and PLA were particularly impressed by the Coalition's SOF contingents that participated in the First Gulf War. Coalition SOF had been assigned a number of missions. Special Forces teams trained Saudi and Free Kuwaiti forces in a number of "technical areas." A number of Saudis had completed BUD/S training and eventually formed the core of three Saudi SEAL teams while United States Navy SEALs helped reconstitute the Kuwaiti Navy after the Iraqi invasion and train the Saudi Navy in fast-boat operations. Coalition SOF units conducted CSAR, the 16th Special Operations Squadron flying MH-53J Pave Low helicopters up to 130 miles into Iraq to rescue downed aircrew. Coalition SOF units designated targets for Coalition PGMs, executed Special Reconnaissance (SR) of terrain and routes of advance toward the Iraqi border and

conducted Direct Action (DA) strikes against vital C2 targets behind Iraqi lines. Special Forces teams helped the Saudi combat engineers clear safe lanes through Iraqi minefields on land; EOD and SEAL teams cleared mines at sea in preparation for a potential amphibious landing (57).

Coalition SOF was most well remembered for a relatively small but strategically important and politically high-visibility role. They were unleashed behind enemy lines to hunt for the Iraqi mobile and fixed SCUD launchers that rained missiles on Israel and Saudi Arabia. The military value of the Coalition SOF SCUD hunt was negligible. The SCUD was a notoriously inaccurate weapon with a Circular Error of Probability (CEP) measured in hundreds of meters. It constituted little military threat when launched as sporadically and in as few numbers as they were (58). Additionally, later analysis revealed that many of the targets located and destroyed by Coalition SOF and air strikes, although purportedly SCUDs and their TELs, were actually clever decoys--fuel tanker trucks, mockups and such. Politically, the SCUD hunting campaign was valuable in that it showed the Israeli government, which had threatened to attack Iraq directly if the SCUDs kept falling, that the Coalition was doing *something* about the big missiles hitting their country. The Coalition SOF SCUD hunting campaign helped smooth Israel's ruffled feathers and kept them from attacking Iraq and upsetting the delicate alliance and consensus the United States had built with the Arab states against Iraq (59). These were capabilities and missions that interested the PLA, and eventually shaped the development and composition of current PLA SOF.

C. PLA SOF OVERVIEW

The PLA was in a unique position to study and learn from the capabilities, equipment, methods and operations of dedicated SOF worldwide. They chose to model their "special-mission POEs" largely on American SOF, partly because the data on them was easily accessible and partly because of the seemingly widespread and constant employment of U.S. SOF units in conflict areas worldwide (60). In addition to the First

Gulf War, the PLA was influenced in large part by the past U.S. experiences in Southeast Asia, Iran and Latin America (most recently, Somalia, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq--again).

Because of Local Limited War's emphasis on a short conflict, PLA SOF development eschewed the Special Forces-style Unconventional Warfare (UW) mission and its focus on a protracted all-aspect war in favor of the purely kinetic and military aspects of DA and SR that were observed during Operation Desert Storm. Consequently, PLA SOF appears to look more like pre-Vietnam War American SOF in its composition and focus. Their capabilities are more akin to those of American Ranger and SEAL teams in their dominant emphasis on DA and SR (61). In fact, although PLA SOF units were modeled on the American example, there is similarity to the Russian SPETSNAZ model. PLA SOF's focus areas of DA and SR and the PLA's contemporary doctrinal emphasis on striking hard and fast at an adversary on a limited front to achieve relative superiority and a quick end seems like former-Soviet doctrine on a smaller scale, which sought a swift end to hostilities by attacking hard and fast over a broad front (62). SPETSNAZ forces also disregarded the American-type UW mission in favor of SOF units that could slash at the enemy's vulnerable areas in support of a quickly ended war in Europe. The Soviets were caught flat-footed in Afghanistan because of their lack of a force, special or otherwise, that was capable of effectively contending with a full-spectrum (military, political, social, cultural and economic factors) threat like the resulting Afghan insurgency that followed their 1979 invasion (63), while American Special Forces successfully used their UW experience to prevail against Communist encroachment in Latin America during the 1980s.

PLA SOF units are collectively referred to as special operations *dadu* which may denote a force of varying size, from a regiment down to a battalion (64). Unlike the American example, PLA SOF is under the direct command and control of the Central Military Commission (CMC) (65), the overarching organization that gives the various branches of the PLA their marching orders. This direct control of the military is a throwback to the post-Soviet pullout from the PRC in the late 1950s, when the CCP feared a loss of control over and loyalty of the military. Because the CCP uses the PLA as

a domestic and external security apparatus it must retain and maintain direct control over the PLA. Consequently, there is no unified SOF command structure within the PLA comparable to USSOCOM, no senior SOF advocate (General or Admiral-type) to address the specific interests and requirements of PLA SOF and task it effectively. CCP leaders who may or may not have an idea of their SOF elements' capabilities are free to employ these units as they see fit, leaving them vulnerable to potential abuse and misuse.⁵

Also, unlike the American SOF example, PLA SOF does not operate an integral SOF mission-trained transportation asset like the 16th Special Operations Squadron, 160th SOAR, HCS-4 or Special Boat Unit. With the exception of infiltrating a target area on foot, PLA SOF must coordinate operations closely with their army, navy and air force brethren in order to deploy on a mission. They are dependent on and at the mercy of aircraft and aircrew that may, but more likely are not be able to fulfill their unique deployment and infiltration requirements (66). In essence, what the PRC currently has is equivalent to the American SOF situation prior to the creation of a unified command structure, when dissimilar units and non-SOF elements were thrown together to conduct a mission on the fly, sometimes with disastrous results (SOG missions in Cambodia, and the failed rescue attempt in Iran, Operation Rice Bowl). PLA SOF is still a young force. These discrepancies may actually get fixed as China acquires greater proficiency and experience at special operations, and gets the inevitable black eye from a failed exercise in power projection. Maybe the PLA will learn faster.

Like American SOF organizations, PLA SOF is often on the leading edge of technological and tactical innovation within the Chinese military and receives the best most sophisticated equipment that the PRC can produce, buy or steal (67). PLA SOF units were among the very first to receive and use the new Type 95 5.8mm modular weapon system.⁶ Designed as the next generation in Chinese small-arms, the Type 95 is a compact bullpup-style weapon that can serve as an assault rifle and squad machine gun. With quick barrel changes, it can downsize to a sub-machinegun or upgrade to a sniper

⁵ Operational and C2 mistakes during the invasion of Grenada precipitated and eventually lead to the creation of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), the overarching special operations command authority, in 1987.

⁶ The Hong Kong Garrison was the first unit issued this weapon, followed by PLA SOF.

rifle (68). PLA SOF units also routinely employ the PPC (Powered Parachute) vehicle. A backpack device which is almost as light and quiet as a traditional parachute but can take off under its own power, the PPC can carry a soldier with a full combat load and infiltrate up to forty-five miles behind enemy lines at 11-21 miles per hour. PLA SOF units have also been conducting trials with the ASN-15 ‘backpack’ UAV, a miniature surveillance vehicle similar in size and concept to the American Silver Fox UAV, that can give SOF teams discrete “over the next hill” battlefield intelligence (69).

PLA SOF units make extensive use of specialized gear like night vision goggles, low-light level vision equipment and portable GPS equipment to help give themselves a qualitative edge over their more conventionally equipped opposition. They also use standard and modified versions of the equipment and weapons designed for conventional forces to meet their own unique mission requirements, such as suppressed weapons and short-barreled, folding-stock variants of standard PLA-inventory assault rifles.

PLA SOF units do not have integral airborne or seaborne transportation capabilities (yet), but, like their American counterparts, can deploy to and infiltrate their mission areas via rotary and fixed-winged aviation assets, surface vessels and submarines, vehicular land transportation, and good old-fashioned leg power. The PRC is even experimenting with high-speed Wing In Ground (WIG) as a means to transport troops and equipment (70). With a potential top speed of 300 knots and an altitude of between three and ninety feet, the WIG could prove an ideal vehicle to stealthily deploy and infiltrate PLA SOF units under the electronic eyes of a regional adversary and onto their coastline.

A proficient SOF operator cannot be grown easily or overnight, so, like their American counterparts, PLA SOF units conduct necessarily lengthy, difficult and realistic training; initial training for the Sword of Southern China SOF unit assigned to the Guangzhou Military Region, a “SEAL-type unit” which specializes in amphibious operations, lasts three years (71). PLA SOF training is similar in scope and focus to that of SOF worldwide in that it emphasizes deft proficiency in various battlefield tasks and adaptability to a wide range of combat contingencies. They are rapidly deployable--one unit based in Beijing can be airborne within two minutes of its activation order--and

apparently train and practice for combat situations on a scenario-driven basis in order to more effectively tailor their actions to unforeseen circumstances.

They are very proficient in small-arms handling, as intimately familiar with their own personal and force inventory weapons as they are with those from foreign countries. PLA SOF units emphasize superior physical fitness in its soldiers. Candidates and unit personnel have a difficult physical fitness regimen that consists of activities familiar to SOF worldwide--push-ups, sit ups, pull-ups, timed runs and swims--and stuff that has yet to see the light of day outside of the PRC (three-mile, twenty-five minute runs with sacks of bricks around the shoulders, a “six-mile dash” with two handfuls of grenades and sandbags around the legs, and “iron sand” exercises to build hardness on the hands and head (72)). All PLA SOF units are trained in airborne operations, all-weather and day/night operations, multiple-environment (desert, cold weather, jungle, mountain, urban) (73) operations and survival, and the martial arts.

Personnel from each unit are likely to have additional, more in-depth training in one or more specialty areas including UAV operations and handling, combat medicine, amphibious and maritime operations, demolitions, various types and modes of communications, computers (both foreign and domestic) and foreign languages, particularly English and those of other potential adversaries. Next to North Korea, which is estimated to possess 100,000 SOF operators (74), the PRC owns the largest SOF contingent in Asia, with between 25,000 and 30,000 SOF troops at its disposal, and have been collectively described as “hawks in the sky, dragons in the sea and tigers on land” by the Chinese media.

1. PLA Special Forces

The largest SOF force in the Chinese military, PLA Special Forces (PLASF) may number as many as 25,000 operators divided among the PRC’s seven military regions (75). PLASF units are organized into *dadu* roughly equivalent in dimension and organization to a standard PLA army regiment, with over a thousand operators organized into three battalions, each with its own headquarters and support unit. Their operations are usually predicated on and designed around small-unit actions. PLASF units actually appear to combine the capabilities and intent of American Ranger and SEAL teams (76);

their shooters are proficient and routinely operate in both land and maritime environments and have been known to execute some missions in company strength (77). They're designed to perform a wide variety of often hazardous mission profiles (but not UW) and extensively trained and skilled to a degree that allows them a reasonable chance of success when compared to the numbers and mass that might be required for a conventional unit to achieve a similar victory. Each of China's seven Military Regions possesses at least one army SOF *dadu*, and they all have properly fierce-sounding names--a unit based out of the Nanjing Military Region is named "The Flying Dragons," one of Guangzhou "The Sword of Southern China" (78).

To date, the primary focus of PLASF lies within three core areas of competency: DA, SR and Information Warfare (IW). For DA missions, defined for the purposes of PLASF as "short-duration strikes and other small-scale offensive activities," the PLASF unit team tasked with the assault will deploy a contingent requisite to mission success. PLASF are highly proficient at working in teams of eight to sixteen familiar to American SOF but may also assign upwards of a hundred operators to a DA mission (79). Under the umbrella of DA, PLASF practice and perform raids on vital enemy-held positions that would require greater conventional army mass to accomplish, prisoner and hostage rescue from positions behind enemy lines and in denied areas, the capture of valuable enemy personnel from secure areas, and counter terrorism operations in a manner similar to Army SFOD-D and Navy DEVGRU. PLA SOF DA objectives run the logical gamut of critical battlefield and rear-area targets and likely include but are not limited to, enemy command posts (both in forward and rear areas), airfields and bridges vital to the success of follow-on conventional forces, tactical and strategic weapons of mass destruction, and key weapons systems that might pose a danger to friendly forces such as air-defense sites and coastal missile batteries.

PLASF-style SR is largely an element of necessity. Driven by the PRC's technological inferiority to American electronic reconnaissance and surveillance systems and China's historical bent toward effective HUMINT collection, PLA SOF SR missions emphasize extensive and detailed eyes-on reconnaissance of targets of interest by human assets (80). Operating in teams of two to eight, PLASF SR contingents are very proficient

and extremely good at what they do. The practice and execution of PLASF SR involves the acquisition of information of national or theater-level significance encompassing the enemy in general and its disposition on the battlefield and in its rear areas, weather and terrain behind enemy lines in preparation for immediate or future infiltration/invasion, locations of enemy command posts, reserves, weapons of mass destruction, key weapons systems and logistic sites in order to gather targeting data and build profiles of critical targets for assaults or strikes, especially for precision-guided weapons systems (PLASF SR teams on the ground may also provide terminal guidance for precision-guided munitions (81)), and possible river-crossing sites and avenues of approach for follow-on conventional forces.

The PLASF IW mission ties directly to the PLA doctrine and strategy of Local War Under High-Tech Conditions. The PLASF IW mission attempts to blind and confuse an enemy force through cutting off its means of command and control. It may actually be considered a subset of the DA mission in that it seeks to seize the initiative in a fast-moving, short-duration regional conflict by directly attacking an enemy's C4ISR assets with PLASF forces. The PLASF IW mission, much like SR, is an expression of the Chinese armed forces' weaknesses in electronic warfare technology when compared against its potential foes, and an attempt to address them with a relatively cost-effective manpower solution (82). These missions range the gamut between dropping a SOF assault unit directly on top of C2 nodes and physically destroying them and/or eliminating their personnel, to deploying SOF units equipped with portable, low-powered electronic warfare gear close enough to intercept, locate and/or jam enemy electronic systems (83).

2. PLA Marine Corps SOF

The PLA Marine Corps itself is a conventional force, equipped with armor, artillery and hovercraft, and consists of two brigades of 6,000-7,000 soldiers each. The smallest PLA SOF contingent, PLA Marine Corp SOF numbers an estimated 1,500 operators--roughly four battalions, or *dadu*, of 300-400 soldiers--distributed among both brigades (84). Their mission within the PLA Marine Corps is twofold and their personnel are separated accordingly. Each brigade owns a single *dadu* of SOF marines and a single

dadu of special amphibious reconnaissance (SAR) marines. The SOF marines are very similar to American Force Marine Reconnaissance units in tactics and doctrine in that their shooters are trained to operate amphibiously, but are primarily detailed to infiltrate ashore under cover of darkness prior to an amphibious landing to gather important operational level intelligence for the amphibious force commander (SR) and to neutralize key targets ashore in preparation and support of an amphibious landing (DA) (85). They conduct operations with as few as two soldiers and as many as the entire battalion of them. It is not inconceivable that SOF marines SR and DA missions would also overlap or mirror those of their PLA brethren, or that they could also have an amphibiously-oriented IW mission to fulfill in support of a landing force.

The SAR marines are entirely different. They are very comparable to the defunct United States Navy Underwater Demolition Teams (UDT) in that its operators are trained in firearms handling and some aspects of land warfare and battlefield tactics, but are primarily detailed to conduct hydrographic surveys and underwater/beach reconnaissance (SR), and clear hazardous obstacles (mines, “dragon’s teeth”) prior to an amphibious assault (86). Like SEALs and UDTs before them, SAR marines most often conduct operations in platoon strength and routinely practice “locking out” of submarines via its torpedo tubes (87).

3. PLAAF Airborne SOF

The 15th PLAAF (PLA Air Force) Airborne Corps, composed of three brigades of 8,000-10,000 soldiers each, is also a largely conventional force. It is equipped with its own light armored vehicles, light towed artillery and attached anti-chemical warfare units, and appears capable of conducting operations of regimental size within a 600 mile radius of departure (88). It has its own SOF units, though very little is known about them. Their size and composition remain speculative, but PLAAF SOF reportedly has “several” *dadu* (battalions) of 400-500 operators. These forces specialize exclusively in DA, specifically seizing airfields and port facilities for follow on airborne, amphibious and PLA units, and attacking enemy headquarters facilities and C2 assets by air assault (89). The latter specialty would seem to assume that there is an entailed IW mission built into PLAAF SOF capabilities. These units deploy and insert primarily via fixed and rotary-

winged assets--either as air-mobile forces or parachutists--but also routinely use the PPC to infiltrate to their mission areas. This *dadu* has been described by the Chinese media as “a sharp knife against the enemy’s HQ” (90).

D. CONCLUSION

The First Gulf War in 1991 had a similar effect on the creation and development of PLA SOF to the Sino-Vietnam War in 1979 on the PLA as a whole. As the latter event forced the PLA to modernize and professionalize to address shortcomings in the PRC’s national defense and its doctrine, the former opened the PLA’s eyes as to how far the PLA had to catch up with the modern world to validate its doctrine of Local Limited War. The creation of the first dedicated SOF unit in the PLA occurred during a very fortuitous time for the PRC. Its brand-new market economy was on the brink of exploding onto the global scene; it had a new generation of soldiers who were tactically and technically proficient enough to train as dedicated SOF operators, and a government and military politically inclined to permit its armed forces had almost forty years of foreign, particularly American, SOF experience from which to draw and acquire useful lessons. An atmosphere existed within the PRC and PLA in which dedicated SOF forces could be created and developed and their place within contemporary doctrine realized.

The First Gulf War offered a brace of new lessons to the PRC and PLA, chief among them being that high-tech warfare was the wave of the future and that their country was woefully unprepared for it. PRC and PLA used these new lessons to fine tune their modernization effort, modifying their doctrine to Local War Under High Tech Conditions and focusing on building superiority and strength into the PLA not military-wide (which was cost-prohibitive) but through well-trained, well-equipped and hard-hitting POE’s which would ideally break a regional adversary on a limited front fast enough to bring conflicts to a rapid close.

Influenced by American SOF and their missions and performance during the First Gulf War, PLA SOF was situated to benefit from and proliferate because of the change in doctrine and emphasis on high technology warfare. It was the PRC special mission POE and power-projection tool. PLA SOF gets the best gear and weaponry first. They are trained to an exacting degree to enable them to infiltrate their mission areas, then strike

hard and fast and ultimately succeed at a task that would require a much larger number of conventional troops. Overall, dedicated PLA SOF units appear very capable and formidable. They do have glaring shortcomings. These forces are still a tool of the Party with no 'face' in the PRC leadership. Lest they travel by foot, PLA SOF units cannot travel or deploy by themselves. The former problem is political, the latter doctrinal and probably financial. Both are fixable. PLA SOF is still a relatively young force and will, much like America's SOF units, doubtless suffer tragic failures because of its current shortcomings.

For the present being, PLA SOF is just what the PRC wants. It is an interim and relatively inexpensive (though limited) power projection tool that the PRC can use while it continues to slowly modernize and acquire more conventional, expensive and technologically advanced power projection capabilities (long-range fighter-bombers, nuclear submarines, aerial refueling, modern C4ISR). PLA SOF's emphasis on DA, SR and IW make it directly attributable to the contemporary doctrine of Local War Under High Tech Conditions.

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IV. PLA SOF AND UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE

PLA SOF is a tool for limited regional power projection, designed to strike fast, hard and precisely at an enemy in accordance with the doctrine of Local War Under High Tech Conditions. This being the case, perhaps DA, SR and IW are the only missions that PLA SOF units realistically need to assume in support of contemporary doctrine. Given what the PRC seeks to achieve in the Asia region, do the current PLA SOF mission areas coincide with overall PRC ambitions, desires and strategy? Is there an American Special Forces-style Unconventional Warfare mission for PLA SOF contingents in the future. Would such a mission support the PRC's strategic goals? Those are the questions that this chapter attempts to answer.

A. PRC STRATEGIC AND POLITICAL OBJECTIVES

What does the PRC seek to achieve for itself in the Asia region? Simply, China seeks to become the dominant regional player in Asian affairs without assuming the unwieldy mantle of a hegemonic power (like its current rival the United States) or conferring it on anyone else, or necessarily having to conduct military operations to achieve its goals. As the regional power, it would like to dominate economic, military and political affairs in Asia and, if not completely edge out the United States, its primary rival in the region, then at least have a firmer hand and more influence there than the United States (91).

The PRC has always taken a realist approach to international politics and played a balance of power game since the 1950s. When the former Soviet Union and the United States were perceived as enemies in the 1960s, China sought to create its sphere of influence around an alliance of weaker states as a way to offset the power of both. Then China allied with the United States against the Soviet Union during the 70s and early 80s when it appeared that Soviet power was ascendant (92). The end of the Cold War and demise of the Soviet Union have left the United States in uncontested command of the field as the world's sole superpower. The international pervasiveness of American influence and global spread of American power have placed the United States into the

position of hegemon. Beijing resists hegemony--especially when it interferes with Chinese national and international interests--believing it an impediment to global peace and prosperity because of the propensity for nations to fight over or resist it (93). Even now, as the PRC takes a “softer” line and seeks to garner favor and influence in the global community through multilateralism (or, at least, bilateralism) with weak and strong states and the world forum of the United Nations, it is still, at heart, playing a variation on the balance of power game to offset the power and influence of the current hegemonic power. Chinese multilateral and bilateral strategic partnerships with its regional neighbors are attempts by Beijing to develop alliances and liaisons that are powerful enough--economically, politically and military--to offset the effects and reality of regional and global (though gradually slipping) American hegemony (94).

The PRC and United States are more economically interdependent than ever. Currently the PRC conducts 40 percent of its foreign trade with the United States, a state of affairs that will continue for the foreseeable future as long as both parties find the arrangement profitable. China, however, also wants to expand and grow stronger. Its own economy is expanding and getting stronger to the tune of eight percent per year and will continue to do so until at least 2010, by which time its GDP will top US \$2.3 trillion. Between 2001 and 2005 the disposable per capita income of urban and rural citizens rose by 9.2 and 5.2 percent, respectively (95). The quality of life in China is better than it has ever been and is improving, as proved by the rise and continued growth of a Chinese middle class and consumerism in the PRC. People are routinely buying what were perceived as luxury goods two decades ago. By the end of 2003, 112 million more Chinese citizens had telephone lines for a total of 532 million telephone subscribers nationwide (96). There are approximately 20 million cars (the surest indicator of personal consumerism, next to houses) motoring the roads of the PRC today, a number estimated to grow sevenfold by 2020.

This continued growth and prosperity comes at a heavy strategic cost; fueling this massive and hungry economy requires a constant flow of natural resources, much of which China must look beyond its borders to acquire. Prior to 1993, the PRC was a net exporter of oil. Today, it is a net importer (China will import over 140 million tons of oil

by this year's end (97)) and last year overtook its regional neighbor, Japan, as the second largest oil importer and consumer in the entire world behind the United States. China, one of the world's top steel producers, must even import 30 million tons of steel annually to stay ahead of the growing economy and insatiable production and industrial demands (98). This situation in which the PRC finds itself will not improve. The so-called 'peaceful rise'⁷ of China is a misnomer in the age of decreased resources, particularly oil, and increased demand for those resources to fuel exploding economies. As China's economy and wealth grows, its demand for resources to fuel them will increase and it will have to acquire those resources somehow if it seeks to continue growing.

The increasing scarcity of resources necessary for national growth and survival indicates that Beijing will eventually have to expand and acquire these resources at the expense of other established and needy economies and consumers, specifically, of the current hegemonic power (and dominant consumer) and its regional neighbors. China seeks to couch its insatiable hunger for economy and energy-feeding resources as an appeal to its regional neighbors to help economize their energy consumption for the good of the global economy, as when Hu Jintao asserted during his speech to APEC leaders in November 2004:

We should work hard to bring about substantive results of the new round of WTO negotiations at an early date, cut back on our differences and frictions, and create an equitable and win-win environment for trade and investment. Given the vital importance of energy to economic development, we should work together to keep the world energy market stable. I hereby propose that APEC step up efforts in the energy field, conduct policy dialogue and deepen cooperation among members in the areas of improving energy efficiency, developing alternative sources of energy and providing affordable energy products to the poor. (99)

Currently, Chinese alliance-building in the region lays much greater emphasis on shared economic strength and prosperity and strong regional economic interdependence instead of political or military collaboration. Deng Xiaoping started the push towards Chinese economic strength and prosperity in the late 1970s with the Four Modernizations and the difficult but bold move toward creating a Chinese market economy that could

⁷ Theory advanced in which China grows and prospers without directly opposing or downgrading to influence and power of its rivals.

take advantage of the of the growing regional and global economies. His legacy was carried on by his successor, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao, current leader of the PRC. Make no mistake, China wants to take the lead in regional economic affairs, and, as the largest country in the region, it is fully capable of doing so. The PRC also realizes that its own prosperity is the key to regional prosperity (100). Excerpts from Hu Jintao's keynote speech during the April 2004 Boao Forum for Asia provides insight as to direction the PRC wants to take the Chinese nation and the region:

We have already set a clear goal for the first 20 years of this century. Namely, in building a well-off society of a higher standard in an all-round way for the benefit of well over one billion Chinese people, we will quadruple the 2000 GDP to 4 trillion US dollars with a per capita GDP of 3,000 US dollars, further develop the economy, improve democracy, advance science and education, enrich culture, foster greater social harmony and upgrade the texture of life for the people.

China is an Asian country. China's development is closely related to Asia's prosperity. China has and will continue to make a positive impact on Asia in the area of development. A developing China generates important opportunities for Asia.

China's development injects fresh vigor to regional cooperation in Asia. China has been extensively involved in the various mechanisms of Asia-based regional cooperation, emphasizing its cooperation and coordination with all the parties and promoting regional economic integration. China has joined the fellow Asian countries in discussing the possibility of free trade areas, conducting various forms of security dialogues and cementing cooperation on the bilateral level while promoting regional cooperation. (101)

Through increased regional economic interdependence, the PRC perceives the means to eventually garner dominant influence in the region that exceeds that of its primary rival, the United States. Economic strength and prosperity is something that Asia as a region desires and can agree on as a priority and vital to national survival in the modern age.

It currently shares a "strategic partnership" with Russia through which it has acquired technologically advanced military hardware to modernize its armed forces, secured its Western frontier, and garnered support from the Russian state for its stance on

the aggressive re-unification of Taiwan and crackdown on the Uighur separatists in Xinjiang (102). It also hopes to open a free trade zone in Eurasia, increase cross-border railroad trade traffic, and open a Russia-to-China pipeline to help relieve China's increasing oil thirst wrought by its exploding economy and growth.

India and China have been involved in long-standing talks regarding cooperative military cooperation, particularly joint exercises between the two states, and soldiers from both countries have routinely met and had meals during training exercises in the rugged border regions between them. As of 12 April 2005, the PRC and India agreed to establish a "strategic partnership for peace and prosperity" that focuses on the economically beneficial aspects of a China-India alliance and encourages both sides to promote, "cooperation in the spheres of education, science and technology, health care, information, tourism, youth exchange, agriculture, dairy development, sports and other fields on the basis of mutual benefit and reciprocity" (103). Both nations readily acknowledge the vital economic dimension of their "partnership" and hope to increase the bilateral trade volume between them to US \$20 billion or higher by 2008 (104).

China and Pakistan have enjoyed good military, political and economic relations with each other for over fifty years--"friendly neighbors linked by mountains and waters," according to PRC former leader, Jiang Zemin--and continue to do so. China has been an investor and collaborator on a number of large Pakistani infrastructure projects that contributed to the strength of Pakistan's economy and the PRC's influence in Pakistan. These projects include the Pakistan Heavy Electrical Complex completed in the 1960s, the Karakorum Highway constructed in the 1970s, the Muzaffargarh power plant which went into operation in the 1980s and the Chashma nuclear power plant completed not long ago (105), "vivid symbols of our friendly cooperation," according to a PRC official.

Relations between Southeast Asia and the PRC are steadily improving, despite China's past as an invader, occupier and sponsor of Communist insurgencies in the region. Near the end of last decade, the PRC had allayed Southeast Asia fears of a Chinese military invasion and downplayed simmering territorial issues between them and focused on foster overall stronger economic ties in the region, a move assisted by China's

refusal to devalue its own currency while those of its neighbors fell during the 1997/98 Asian economic crisis (106). As of November 2004, China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN: Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) agreed to gradually remove tariffs, creating the world's largest free-trade area by 2011 (107).

Although the PRC regards Korea as a single entity (not North and South), it is politically savvy enough to deal with them on a per-state basis. The border between the DPRK and China is virtually porous, with unimpeded travel between them, particularly in light of the North's worsening economic situation. The PRC receives refugees and day workers seeking better wages and living conditions in China while. Much to Seoul's relief, China also acts as intermediary between the DPRK and United States. Although the ROK is wary of the PRC's intentions in the region and still needs the United States as a hedge against it and the DPRK, it still likes the prospects of continued Chinese economic growth. It perceives Chinese economic prosperity in a dual light: as a potential threat and competitor to the ROK's economy, particularly in the IT sector⁸, but also as expanded business prospects and opportunities to acquire wealth for the South (108). Since the normalization of relations between the two countries in 1992, the ROK has poured over US \$30 billion in direct investment into the PRC. In 2002, the PRC eclipsed the United States as the ROK's primary trading partner, garnering 20.9 percent (US \$40 billion) of exports against the United State's 20.2 percent, a trade volume between the two Asian states that grows by 20 percent annually (109).

Officially, Taiwan-China relations appear locked in the status quo as the PRC maintains its "one China" stance, asserts that the China-Taiwan relations are a domestic matter, and that Taiwan is a breakaway province that must be reunified with the PRC by whatever means necessary, even if it means military action. The Anti-Secession Law adopted by the PRC on 13 March 2005 raises the ante even further as any effort by Taiwan to overtly achieve independence from the mainland could be legally met with military force by the PRC (110). Unofficially, visits by the Democratic People's Party

⁸ South Korea is placing tighter controls on the export of electronic and telecommunications technology to the PRC where it previously had not. China's own high-tech exports constitute 38 percent of its export totals, roughly equivalent to South Korea's.

(DPP) government's opposition, particularly the leaders of the Peoples' First Party (PFP) and Kuomintang Party (KMT), and the PFP leader's public stance against Taiwanese independence signals a warming of relations between the two states (111) that could mean reconciliation and have negative repercussions on American influence in the region. Direct economic ties between China and Taiwan are still negligible, despite the membership of both countries in the World Trade Organization, brisk and expanding commerce between them continue through Hong Kong. China and Taiwan conducted US \$41 billion in cross-straits trade in 2003 and over US \$50 billion in 2004 (112).

With the second largest economy in the world and status as a traditional American regional ally, Japan could become a military rival to the PRC. China, still haunted by the Japanese occupation and its atrocities during the Second World War, worries about latent Japanese militarism. This dynamic has been kept down in the post-war years by the presence of the United States, the seeming pacifist tendencies of its post-war generation and the prosperous Japanese economy. China will use the "war-guilt card" against Japan for the foreseeable future as a means to garner various concessions from the island state and to ensure that Japan finds it politically uncomfortable to rearm itself (113). A Japan with a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council is a direct challenge to the power and influence that China holds as the sole Asian power with such a position.

Simultaneously, the PRC seeks expanded trade opportunities with Japan. Despite the bloody history between them, both are sufficiently pragmatic to realize that they stand to gain much through a strong China-Japan trade alliance, one not separated by oceanic or regional barriers. Current estimates indicate that by the year 2015 the volume of China-Japan trade *will* outstrip that between the United States and Japan (114). Continuing economic growth and political stability in China and greater economic integration with Japan will contribute to the strengthening of the Sino-Japanese relationship and the growth of the PRC's regional power and influence.

By creating regional alliances that gradually enhance Chinese influence and power while checking the economic influence and power of the United States, a country not even a geographical part of the region, the PRC may potentially achieve the sort of

Asian regional dominance and influence it desires and the kind of power that doesn't necessarily require force of arms to back up.

This is not to say that the PRC is averse to using military power on its regional neighbors in support of its own objectives. It has done so on eight separate occasions between the founding the PRC and 1980. The PRC's sent troops to fight in Korea in 1950 in response to a perceived threat of an American invasion across the Yalu River and into China. The PRC consolidated its control over Tibet in 1958 when it sent the PLA to crush Tibetan insurgents who had opposed the imposition of Beijing's rule. China twice shelled the Taiwanese-held islands of Quemoy and Matsu, in 1954 in response to the lifted American naval blockade and perceived threat of invasion by Taiwan and in 1958 in retaliation for the deployment of American nuclear-capable forces to Taiwan (115). The PLA routed the Indian army during the Sino-Indian war and prevented Indian forces from occupying territories in the North-East Frontier Agency (now called the Arunachal Pradesh) that were disputed by both countries. The Sino-Soviet military buildup and border clashes resulted from Chinese suspicions of Soviet intentions toward the PRC after the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, and the PRC's shift in focus from an American to a Soviet threat. The PLA seized the Xisha (Paracel) Islands from South Vietnam in a joint amphibious operation in 1974 to enforce its claim to them after a territorial dispute. China even invaded its former partner, Vietnam, in 1979 in "punishment" for the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. Currently, the PRC has sent naval and ground forces to outposts on the oil and gas-rich Spratly Islands to assert its claim to them (116) over four other regional claimants (Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines), and it still reserves the right to reunify Taiwan by force if necessary.

Ideally, China does not seek to exercise military force within the very region that it is striving to nurture strong economic ties. Nothing shatters a nation's economy more quickly than the destruction wrought by war, especially a modern high-tech war that would bring fast moving forces and massive firepower to bear on an opponent's military forces and infrastructure in an effort to bring a conflict to a speedy end. The PRC desires strategic or at least amicable partnerships with its neighbors and the economic

interdependence that these partnerships engender as a means to reduce the possibility of having to exercise military action and increase its own influence and power in the Asia region.

B. PLA SOF AND PRC AMBITIONS

Where does PLA SOF fit into within China's strategic ambitions of regional dominance? PLA SOF are an attempt by the PRC to develop a relatively inexpensive power-projection capability for itself and expand its strategic military reach beyond its own borders while checking or threatening the military ambitions of other regional players. Being a dominant regional power means possibly having to exercise military force against threats to that power, even if one does not want to. As a means to infiltrate and covertly spy on and precisely attack potential regional rivals, PLA SOF can serve as "soft" coercion. It presents the veiled but very real threat of military action by an "invisible" foe leveled against a would-be regional adversary. A precise and discrete force, PLA SOF are the surgeon's scalpel hidden in the sleeve cuff in contrast to the arcing sledgehammer of a mobilization on the border, air strike or blitzkrieg-style attack by massed high-tech forces, and can help reduce the collateral destruction wrought by a high-tech blitzkrieg-style war.

China has come a long way from its modernization efforts in the late 1970s. The PLA has a professional force with better more technologically advanced equipment and an effective-looking but unproven doctrine and strategy for their collective use. In numbers, it is the most powerful indigenous military in the Asian region (though not the most high-tech), seconded only by India (117). Much of the PLA, though better trained, operates 1950s-1960s gear because the state economy still takes priority over the military. PLA SOF is a relatively inexpensive and cost-effective means for the PRC to exercise a degree of regional force projection while its hardware-based force projection capabilities are purchased, developed or catch up. In accordance with the prevailing doctrine of Local War Under High Tech Conditions, PLA SOF is an existing and developing though limited tool for precision surveillance and strike.

PLA SOF have been a part of the PLA force structure for nearly two decades, during which time they have continued to acquire more sophisticated weapons and gear

while training and honing their skills. During the 1990s and 2000s, they participated in a number of large scale exercises in the Military Regions and the Taiwan Straits in support of PLA conventional forces, while, like most SOF units worldwide, keeping a relatively low profile. PLA SOF units can be transported in a number of ways to target locations, infiltrate within striking distance and conduct reconnaissance, attack or both missions. Following the example of American SOF, PLA SOF are also a discrete and logical choice of weapon with which the PRC may deal with current and future regional conflicts, a coercive tool that could be used without the risk of potentially escalating tensions to the point where larger scale and more destructive conventional forces are committed (118). It is a force in synchronization with the PRC's current doctrine and strategy of Local War Under High-Tech Conditions; it is tactically and technically proficient, equipped with the best and most advanced gear that the PRC can supply; it can deploy and strike on short notice and, because of its soldiers' training and high-tech equipment, achieve a relative local superiority over its adversaries locally to resolve conflicts quickly.

Interestingly, although the PLA possesses dedicated SOF modeled on American SOF, it seems satisfied, for the time being, with the DA and SR missions these forces perform. There does not appear to be much interest or desire to build an American SOF-style Unconventional Warfare capability into PLA SOF, despite the historical and doctrinal propensity, and apparent success with such operations. People's War itself was an enormous national-scale UW campaign. The PRC's attempts to export Communism to and inspire Communist insurgencies in its regional neighbors--in some cases, successfully--proves that UW is a skill that the PRC knows and can apply very well.

C. UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE AND US SPECIAL FORCES

In Thomas K. Adams' book *US Special Operations Forces in Action*, the author defines Unconventional Warfare (UW) as:

Those military activities conducted within a conflict environment that are not directed toward or directly supporting conventional warfare. It includes humanitarian operations, complex emergencies, insurgency and counterinsurgency, support to civil authority, nation-building and some forms of subversion, sabotage and similar activities. Intelligence gathering

is an incidental function in most forms of UW. It is distinguished from conventional warfare by the fact that UW does not seek to destroy enemy military forces in combat (119).

The United States Department of Defense (DOD) defines UW as:

A SOF principal mission involving a broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, normally of long duration, predominately conducted by indigenous or surrogate forces who are organized, trained, equipped, supported and directed, in varying degrees, by an external source. UW includes guerrilla warfare and other direct-offensive, low-visibility, covert, or clandestine operations, as well as the indirect activities of subversion, intelligence activities, and evasion and escape (120).

Both definitions generally agree in their emphasis on conducting long-duration operations in support of ultimately larger political objectives.

As the PLA has a successful history with special operations missions, it has an equally distinguished past as practitioners of Unconventional Warfare as described by both Adams and the DOD. During the 1948-1960 Malayan Emergency Chinese “Red Army” officers infiltrated Malaya from the PRC to help reorganize and train the Communist Chinese and Malayan guerrilla forces in support of the Malayan Communist Party’s (MPC) ongoing insurgency against the British colonial forces (121). PLA military advisors participated in both phases of the Indochina War; during the siege of Dien Bien Phu, China provided 6,000 tons of food and material assistance to the People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN), including over 200 heavy artillery pieces and PLA crews to operate them; American Studies and Observation Group (SOG) missions routinely encountered Chinese military advisors among the Viet Cong and PAVN units they encountered in North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (122). In order to determine the possibility of the PLA SOF developing an American Special Forces-style Unconventional Warfare capability we must first examine what defines such a capability and what is entailed therein.

As the Second World War drew to close, the Office of Special Services (OSS), the United State’s premiere intelligence gathering and special operations apparatus, had civilian and military operational components. The civilian part, three-man Jedburgh

teams, infiltrated German-occupied territory to make contact with and aid resistance forces in Europe, while the military piece, Operational Groups (OG), consisted of fifteen-man teams of very experienced soldiers. They were highly skilled in battlefield tradecraft and trained in the language of their mission areas in order to help them communicate and blend in with the civilian populations and guerrilla fighters with whom they'd contact and interact.

Their mission was difficult: lead, live with and fight like the indigenous guerrillas; wreak havoc behind the enemy lines through ambush, sabotage and being difficult to catch; and provide useful intelligence to Allied commanders. The OG component of the OSS evolved into the current United States Army Special Forces, more commonly known as Green Berets. The end of the Second World War and onset of the Cold War saw the projected enemy change, but the mission remained essentially the same. In the event of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe, and in the face of overwhelming Soviet conventional superiority and the inevitability of being overrun, Special Forces detachments were detailed as stay-behind units which would raise American-friendly guerrilla forces behind Soviet lines and cause all manner of destruction and mayhem in the enemy occupied territories.

The Kennedy administration opened the door to the Special Forces UW mission. During the 1950s and 1960s, American military and civilian leaders became increasingly concerned with the emergence and spread of Communism and the methodology behind its seeming success. Greek Communist guerrillas had challenged the state and were crushed only through massive American assistance. The PRC had emerged under the Communist banner after a four year civil war with American-backed Nationalist forces. The Malayan Emergency would rage for twelve years as British forces attempted to root out and destroy the Chinese and Malayan Communist insurgents. The first chapter in the Indochina War had ended with a Communist victory over the French colonial forces.

These were but a few of the conflicts involving Communist insurgent forces and the politically-driven wars they preferred to wage, particularly in the post-colonial Third World where the Communist ideology "made sense" to populations tired of external domination. These conflicts highlighted a growing realization in the White House and

Pentagon that future conflicts--“just wars of national liberation” as stated by Nikita Khrushchev⁹--might require forces and methods beyond the capabilities of the conventional military. Despite the assertions of some American military leaders that, “any good soldier can handle guerrillas,”¹⁰ President Kennedy advocated and sought to develop military forces capable of effectively addressing the various factors--military, social, cultural, economic and political--that contributed to the spread and apparent popularity of Communism. Kennedy assigned that developmental task to the United States Army Special Forces (123).

Currently, a United States Special Forces-style UW capability addresses the gamut of traditional conventional operations, most specifically variations on DA (raids, including counter terrorism) and SR, but distinguish themselves as the sole American SOF unit specifically developed and trained to address the full spectrum and combinations of UW tasking. In addition to being very experienced soldiers, adaptable to a variety of climates and conditions, and highly skilled in combat tradecraft, Special Forces are acknowledged cultural and language experts in the particular region to which they are assigned (1st Special Forces Group is responsible for the Pacific and East Asia region and its operators are Korean/Chinese/Indonesian cultural experts and language speakers, 5th Group covers the Southwest Asia and Northeast Africa region and its soldiers are trained in the cultures and languages indigenous to those regions, and so on).

American Special Forces soldiers are skilled teachers and trainers and battlefield diplomats, responsible for raising, advising and sometimes leading effective fighting forces from the indigenous populations of their regions. During the 1980s the 7th Special Forces Group prepared the Honduran Military to resist and defeat a Nicaraguan invasion (124). 5th Special Forces Group operators advised and fought side by side with Afghan warlords and rebels during Operation Enduring Freedom and, working together, eventually ran the Taliban and Al Qaeda out of Afghanistan (125). Because of their cultural awareness and language capability, extensive training, and adaptability, Special

⁹ Mentioned in a speech given by the Soviet leader in 1961 in which he pledged Soviet support for such wars.

¹⁰ Army Chief of Staff (1960-62) George Decker: rationale against mounting a concerted counter-insurgency effort against the Viet Cong and PAVN.

Forces operators are often required to live and thrive among their indigenous hosts and out of contact of other American units for extended periods of time. As such, they are the ideal agents to discover what motivates and moves a region's indigenous population, and exploit that discovery in support of the United State's political and strategic objectives. Under the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) program, Special Forces elements were assigned to remote Montagnard villages to arm and train their fiercely independent populations to resist Viet Cong and PAVN "tax collectors" during the Vietnam War (126).

Currently, PLA SOF is where it needs to be as far as missions and capabilities that support Local War Under High-Tech Conditions and the PRC's goal of regional dominance. China is certainly capable of developing and successfully employing a "Green Beret" type UW capability in its SOF contingents; UW according to Adams takes into account a range of actions, from insurgent training to nation-building, all in support of an ultimately political goal. The DOD definition of UW is more military in orientation, but is also cognizant of the desired political outcome. Both definitions of UW and People's War itself are geared toward fighting a lengthy politically motivated conflict.

Presently, a built in UW capability is something that the PRC neither requires nor desires from PLA SOF or any of its other military units. From a doctrinal and military perspective, a PLA SOF UW capability is outside of the constraints or operational objectives of Local War Under High Tech Conditions. Current PLA doctrine borrows heavily from Chinese military analysts' studies of the First Gulf War and the Coalition's victory in the war. It emphasizes a fast-moving, violent attack with overwhelming, high technology forces and massive quantities of PGMs within a limited area (A War Zone Campaign) to achieve relative superiority over hostile forces and end regional or border conflicts swiftly (127). Logically, Local War Under High Tech Conditions might entail penetration of the adversary's borders, airspace or territorial waters in order that the opposing forces are destroyed and the fighting brought to an end, but it neither requires nor desires the long-term occupation of or stationing of troops in the target state's territory.

PLA SOF is, pure and simple, a reconnaissance and raiding force, one capable of supporting conventional operations or conducting them, albeit on a smaller scale and higher intensity than the conventional military. In line with Local Limited War Under High Tech Conditions, PLA SOF can hit hard and fast, and do so with surgical precision in support of PRC regional power projection. An American-style UW capability entails the intention and determination to stay in a target state's territory for a long stretch of time, sometimes in order to affect regime change and in violation of that state's sovereignty. The PRC feels very strongly about maintenance and violation of sovereignty, a throwback to when it was invaded, treated unfairly and raped for resources by greedy European powers, then invaded, brutalized and raped for resources by the Japanese.

Except in cases when the PRC believed that it was upholding its territorial claims (Tibet, Parcels), ¹¹ it has not sought to occupy ground for any appreciable length of time in another country's territory in violation of that country's sovereignty. The PRC withdrew its troops from Korea once the fighting there had ended in 1953, while American forces have been there since. It withdrew to the original "line of actual control" in Arunachal Pradesh shortly after it had routed the Indian army there (128). It withdrew its mauled forces from Vietnam in 1979 after sixteen bloody days. The closest the PRC got to American SOF-style UW was when the PRC sought to export Communism to and foment Communist insurgencies in its regional neighbors. The clandestine nature of such insurgencies and the organizations that drove them did not allow the infiltrated Chinese military advisors the luxury of remaining stationary and "holding ground," at least not until the "Third Phase" when the insurgents had grown powerful enough to convert to the counteroffensive against their adversaries. Nevertheless, Chinese advisors remained in country as advisors to the guerrillas until the Communist forces had either lost (Malaya) or won (Vietnam). Dedicated PLA SOF, in keeping with contemporary PRC military doctrine and sensibilities about sovereignty, are designed and inclined to spy on and

¹¹ Tibet is a contiguous region of China and the Parcels were claimed as part of the Hainan Island province.

attack ground, not hold it. There is no current or future doctrinal basis for the creation of a UW capability within dedicated PLA SOF.

From a strategic perspective, for the foreseeable future, UW is not a capability that the PRC requires or desires. The PRC has been gradually easing toward its strategic goal of becoming the dominant player in the region through strong regional economics ties with its neighbors rather than force of arms. China's economic growth and prosperity make it an attractive investment opportunity to the regional players, especially now that the current power in the region, the United States, is been distracted with the Global War On Terror and American military power and economic strength are going to Iraq, Afghanistan and that long festering wound in the hind end of Europe, the Balkans. The PRC enjoys and continues to cultivate a lucrative state of economic interdependence with its regional neighbors. Even former die-hard enemies like Japan and Taiwan see the monetary benefits to connecting more closely with and supporting the continued economic expansion of the PRC (129). This interdependence is beneficial to all involved and would be destroyed or at the very least seriously damaged by armed conflict in the region.

When the PRC was sponsoring Communist insurgencies among its regional neighbors, there was a definite strategic incentive for China to engage in UW campaigns in places like Malaya, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Supporting Communist insurgencies which created neighboring Communist regimes served to strengthen China's position in the region by giving it an ally and expanded sphere of influence toward the strategic objective of exporting and supporting Communism worldwide. It was a similar game played by the United States. In accordance with NSC68 and the later Reagan Doctrine, the United States sought to stamp out Communism or Communist insurgencies wherever they cropped up or festered, which gained it allies and additional spheres of influence toward the overall strategic goal of containing and eventually "rolling back" Communism (130).

Exporting Communism worldwide and inspiring insurgencies is a dead issue for the PRC; there was no real profit in it, so very little opportunity for economic growth and prosperity for the state. One glance at the collapsed economies of the former-Soviet

Union and North Korea reassured Beijing that it had made the right choice, transitioning to a market economy and plugging into regional and international trade. Additionally, a Chinese UW capability would be neither useful nor desired by the PRC's regional neighbors. The last thing any of them (with the possible exception of Burma which is attempting to modernize its military with PRC assistance) want to see within their borders or territorial waters are Chinese soldiers of any kind, especially ones that plan on staying awhile. If anything would strain the economic ties that bind the PRC with its neighbors it would be an unwanted Chinese military presence on their territory. China enjoys its current and very lucrative economic arrangement with its neighbors; it has no real incentive to seek military action against them.

The PRC's strategic goals are gradually coalescing. It is more economically interconnected with its regional neighbors than ever and, as it continues to grow economically, it will also do so in regional influence and power. China has already overtaken the United States as South Korea's primary trading partner; Japan will most likely follow by 2015 with India and others close on its heels. A regional trading bloc that massive and powerful, and led by the PRC, could eventually edge out or greatly diminish American regional influence and give China the regional dominance it seeks without ever having to resort to military force. PLA SOF, like the PRC's other forces, conventional and otherwise, are an effective hedge against a conflict that might threaten the collective regional economy. It presents an implied threat of power projection outside of Chinese borders at first, to avoid large-scale military escalation and force an adversary to "back down," and a discrete precision-attack instrument as a last resort. There is no real current or future strategic reason for the PRC to develop a UW capability for PLA SOF.

D. CONCLUSION

The PRC seeks to achieve a position of regional dominance in Asia, and it will do so through simple balance of power politics using regional economic strength and influence as its new forum. China is growing wealthier and more prosperous every year with a consequent increase in its domestic consumerism, energy use and consumption of resources to drive its burgeoning economy. It wants to expand, and so it will have to obtain these resources somewhere and somehow, and it must do so at the expense of its

regional rival, the United States, a country an ocean away. It may eventually achieve this goal; although it is economically interdependent with the United States to the tune of 40 percent of its foreign trade, it is quickly cultivating similar relationships with its regional neighbors. Russia could be a non-starter, but is still a useful weapons and technology bazaar. Pakistan has been its ally for 50 years. India, Korea, ASEAN, Taiwan and Japan, most former enemies and rivals, are all forging stronger economic ties with the PRC which will eventually trump those of the United States.

In accordance with Local War Under High Tech Conditions, PLA SOF play into the PRC's ambitions as a means of limited and discrete regional power projection. It is an implied consequence to regional players attempting to buck China's rising economic power with military aggression, and a fast, hard-hitting first-response force to be used in unfortunate event military force is required. These forces are well trained and capable of "making the point" in support of the PRC's goals without risking the mess of escalating hostilities to conventional forces and disrupting the region's interdependent economy.

The American SOF-style UW mission never really comes into play for dedicated PLA SOF. The PRC is fully capable of developing UW for its SOF contingents and has even conducted several UW campaigns in the past. Doctrinally, the UW mission does not fit the contemporary PLA's emphasis on fighting violent, high-speed, short duration conventional wars, nor does it conform to the PRC's seeming aversion to holding territory that does not belong to it. Strategically, UW is also a bad fit because the PRC is no longer concerned with exporting Communism worldwide, an ideal time and forum for UW, but expanding its economic power within the Asia region. It does not require a fighting force that can "win the hearts and minds" of its regional neighbors; its economy is doing that job. All it needs in a SOF capability is excellent surveillance and direct action ability.

V. CONCLUSION

A. RECAP

The Maoist-inspired doctrine of People's War did no favors for the PRC as far as giving it an armed force capable of fighting modern wars. It was predicated on the perception of comparative Chinese weaknesses against other economically wealthier and more technologically developed states. It was purely defensive in nature in that it allowed for an enemy invasion of China and ended when the enemy had been beaten back and ejected from Chinese territory. People's War was heavy on infantry and politically indoctrinated/reliable troops, poor in technology and militarily professional forces, and made no provision for a long-term stay within an enemy's borders.

With the exception of the "War of Resistance Against Japan," it was not used a single time by Chinese armed forces in modern warfare. Korea, India, Vietnam, all were ground offensives against other sovereign states within the Asia region. The Tibet and the Xisha Island campaigns do not qualify because of their status as historically Chinese sovereign territory, but, like the others, there was the offensive element in them. People's War took very little account of the changing technological face of modern warfare and de-emphasis of infantry warfare, save a late 1970s name change to People's War Under Modern Conditions which was more of the same but with decrepit military hardware and nuclear weapons.

Consequently, when the PLA came face to face with Vietnam, a determined regional adversary that was smaller but armed with the best that the former-soviet Union and United States could offer, their ground offensive was a costly fiasco. The Sino-Vietnamese War, even more than Deng Xiaoping's Four Modernizations, was primarily responsible for pushing the PLA towards building a modern, professional fighting force. This war was the initial agent of change in the PLA; it prompted a streamlining of the infantry-heavy military to make way for modern, technologically advanced gear and gave priority to military and technical proficiency over political reliability, resulting in a military and political atmosphere within the PRC and PLA in which dedicated PLA SOF could eventually emerge.

Chinese perceptions of events within and beyond their borders during the late 1970s and early 1980s contributed to the PLA SOF-friendly atmosphere within the PRC. In Chinese eyes, the former-Soviet Union was on the decline while the United States was on the rise. Both superpowers had accumulated massive stockpiles of nuclear and conventional weapons, but neither possessed the strategic advantage to use them first. Not only was the PRC taking its first baby steps into the global market economy, but it believed that a general period of peace was at hand during which it could strengthen its own economy and military. Most importantly, as the superpowers jockeyed for influence in the Third World, those nations played both sides against the middle to their own advantage, leading to an overall slackening of superpower influence and the emergence of conflicts rooted in ethnic, economic or historical disputes rather than ideologically-driven polar tensions.

The defensive doctrine of People's War gave way to the more offensive Local Limited War as the doctrine for fighting these new conflicts. Designed to project high-tech combat power into the Asia region beyond the PRC's borders and shores, it looked great in theory, but was a strategic and practical impossibility for the cash-strapped technologically-lacking PRC when it was instituted in 1984-85. Lacking effective power projection tools or the means to develop or purchase them for the immediate future, the PRC and PLA turned to a ready resource that it had in plentiful supply to build a relatively inexpensive power projection capability that would not break the bank. The state now possessed the manpower with the necessary training, professionalism and military-oriented mindset to create and develop dedicated PLA SOF contingents. It also had the readily available historical examples and lessons of American SOF to draw on and from which to model their own SOF units, resulting in the creation of the first dedicated PLA SOF unit in the Guangzhou Military Region in 1988.

The United States provided motivation for the acceleration of PLA SOF through the venue of the First Gulf War. In addition to a modification of doctrine to Local War Under High Tech Conditions in the face of the American-led Coalition's fast, violent, high-tech blitzkrieg against the Chinese-equipped Iraqi armed forces, the PLA was able to learn from the missions and experiences of Coalition SOF units. They incorporated

much of what they gleaned into the creation and development of additional SOF units and capabilities during the 1990s and early 2000s. Between the three branches of the PLA, there are 25,000-30,000 PLA SOF operators: roughly 7-8 percent of the total force.

Although PLA SOF contingents appear modeled closely on American SOF, there are distinct differences, specifically in their disregard of an American SOF-style UW capability. This rejection is not difficult to understand in the context of PLA military doctrine and what the PRC wants to achieve in the region. Under Local War Under High Tech Conditions, PLA SOF need not have a UW capability to be a power projection tool. It does not need to infiltrate its regional neighbors with the intentions of recruiting their populations to fight against their governments, or occupy foreign ground for any appreciable amount of time. PLA SOF just has to hit hard, fast and precisely toward the goal of ending regional conflicts quickly and avoiding an escalation of hostilities. Strategically, the PRC is doing with strategic partnerships and economic interdependence what it is loathe attempt through force of arms: increase its influence and power to become the dominant player in the Asia region. Presently, there is no real gain for the PRC by building an integral UW capability into the PLA or PLA SOF.

B. WHAT'S NEXT?

Is there a possibility in the future for the creation and development of an integral PLA SOF UW capability? What is the potential long-range view for the prospects of dedicated PLA SOF? Since the development of Chinese military capabilities rest upon trends in the PRC and in the world, an assessment of such trends is necessary. As long as the resources keep flowing into the PRC, we may anticipate a continuation of the economic growth and prosperity that China has enjoyed in degrees since Deng Xiaoping's reforms in the late 1970s.

Where is the breaking point at which resource demand and consumption outpace the ability of large consumer states like the PRC and United States to locate and supply them? Already, the global petroleum market is feeling the strain of the demand that just these two countries are putting on it. Fuel prices at the pump which were between 90 cents and US \$1.20 per gallon in the late 1990s in the United States have soared to nearly

US \$3.00 nationwide in the wake of the GWOT, Second Gulf War and occupation, and swiftly increasing Chinese demand (131). The petroleum supply is finite, and given both China's and the United States' insatiable thirst for oil to fuel their energy requirements and economies--not to mention those of other modern industrialized nations--the situation will only tighten. With the PRC's continuing focus on economic growth, a threat of reduced petroleum intake might be perceived as a threat to the state as a whole and become a potential bone of contention between it and the United States.

Could a conflict over dwindling oil supplies and who controls them become a military one? There is potential for it. The ongoing five-way feud over the Spratly Islands is driven not only by issues of historical national sovereignty, but by the desires of the individual claimants to develop the islands and their surrounding area for their oil and natural gas wealth. Skirmishes between China and the other claimants over the Spratlys have led to the destruction of Chinese military property and the deaths of Vietnamese sailors (132). Recently, China has played down the dispute over the Spratlys in an attempt to foster greater economic interdependence in the region, but the possibility of military action exists. Likewise, the possibility of a military confrontation between the United States and the PRC over resources, although remote, exists. However, considering the United States is the PRC's and much of the Asia region's primary trading partner and global meal ticket (at least until a regional trade bloc can, if at all, replace it), and a more powerful military entity to boot, it seems unlikely that the PRC would opt for military action against it to secure resources.

Will PLA SOF be able to address its current problems and by doing so acquire additional capability? Logistically, PLA SOF is hamstrung by its dependence on extra-unit transportation to deploy, infiltrate to the mission and exfiltrate afterwards. It appears to be a system that works for now; like military organizations worldwide, the PLA works on the "if it ain't broke don't fix it" principle. It took the Sino-Vietnamese War to make the PRC and PLA modernize, professionalize and adopt a modern warfighting doctrine. Unfortunately for PLA SOF, it will most likely require a major special operations

debacle, probably on the order of a Desert One¹², to force the PRC and PLA to address the potential dangers of mixing and matching conventional and special operations forces.

Likewise, the direct control the CMC exercises over its PLA SOF contingents, which likely won't change as long as the PLA remains a tool for domestic and external security. Desert One was a harbinger of disaster for the disjointed American SOF command structure. The invasion of Grenada was the breaking point and impetus for the United States building a unified SOF-specific and led command structure (133). It will be interesting to see what, if anything, does the trick for the PRC and PLA SOF.

Is there a possibility, no matter how seemingly remote now, of the PRC adopting a UW capability for its armed forces in the future? Will there be teams of "Red Beret" (134) advisors and PLA Civil Affairs personnel dispatched throughout the region in pursuit of the PRC's objective of gaining or maintaining dominant regional influence and power? The emergence of the United States Army's Special Forces UW mission was a direct adjunct to the country's strategic goal of containing then beating back Communism (and the insurgencies it engendered) wherever it reared its head around the world. The Kennedy Administration wanted to develop a force that was capable not only of dealing with Communist guerrillas in the field, but tackling the myriad other less military factors within the society of a particular state that encouraged their creation and spread and made Communism seem an attractive option (135). It seems difficult (for this author, at least) to imagine what strategic benefits the PRC would reap through a PLA UW effort within its regional neighbors' borders. What would be the selling point and motivation for mounting such an expedition? What would be the targeted disaffected portion of the population among the Asia region with which the PLA would connect? What region host government could benefit from the deployment of PLA troops on their territory?

Currently, and probably for the foreseeable future, the PRC's regional neighbors appear, for the most part, to be satisfied with their own gradually improving individual economic situations and their increasing economic interdependence with PRC. By 2011, ASEAN and the PRC will have between them the largest free trade zone in the world,

¹² United States' 1980 attempt to mount a special operation in Iran to rescue American hostages following the Iranian Revolution.

helping even the poorer CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam) set to grow and prosper. The steadily improving economic conditions in the region will likely reduce the possibility of domestic strife and the possibility of factions within the population willing to become or support guerrilla fighters. Both the Malayan Emergency and Huk Rebellion stand as historical examples of how improved economics among the general population helped cut guerrillas off from their lifelines in the towns and countryside during an insurrection in progress.¹³

Peace in the region is good for everybody's economic growth and prosperity; nobody there wants to see that change. Presently and for the foreseeable future, the PRC has no motivation to undertake a UW campaign on its neighbors' territory; it is working toward exactly what it wants strategically by fostering strong economic ties with them. Somehow, a UW campaign under the strategic auspices of "stopping the encroachment of rampant free-market capitalism" just does not seem plausible in the contemporary Asia region.

What disaffected population could a PLA SOF UW campaign target within its regional neighbors? None, if the PRC seeks to successfully continue its drive toward increasing its own personal wealth, influence and power, and economic interdependence in the region. Muslim fundamentalists are probably the most dangerous of the disaffected factions in the region and the PRC would not touch them with a ten foot pole. China has a long history of strife with Muslim rebellions within its own borders dating back to the Qing Dynasty (136). The PRC has publicly supported Russia's attempts to crush Chechen separatists and openly supports the United States' GWOT to justify cracking down on Muslim fundamentalists in Xinjiang (137). Despite the desires of the regional governments to cash in on the PRC's increasing economic prosperity, there is no way that they would willingly invite PLA troops into their respective countries.

China has worked hard to gain the trust of its neighbors, but many are still suspicious of Chinese military intentions in the region. The Southeast Asian states in

¹³ 600,000 Chinese Malays were resettled into "New Villages" and given their own land, isolating them from the Chinese Communist insurgents while simultaneously improving their overall standard of living. The Philippine population in the countryside was similarly located to settlements on Mindinao where they were given their own land and separated from the Communist Huks.

particular are still haunted by the centuries-long history of Chinese domination and the twentieth century legacy of the PRC's support of Communist insurgencies within their territories. With the exceptions of Myanmar, which admits PLA troops to help revamp and modernize its armed forces, and Indonesia where the PLA assisted in the post-tsunami cleanup,¹⁴ Chinese troops are, for the most part, unwelcome guests within the borders of the PRC's regional neighbors.

The Prospects for an integral UW capability within PLA SOF seem non-existent at this time in history and for the foreseeable future.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

The PRC appears to be building a conventional military capability based on the United States' model. Even its dedicated SOF contingents are designed and tasked with a conventional warfighting capability in mind, as befits the doctrine of Local Limited War Under High Tech Conditions. Let them build. For now and the immediate future, the PRC armed forces are limited to regional operations, which might seem threatening except for the country's emphasis on strengthening its own economy and building economic bridges between itself and its neighbors, reducing the potential for conflict and regional destabilization. The PRC's economy and technological base, so far, cannot support the kind of force that would permit guaranteed success against a concerted effort by a determined high-tech adversary, hence their current focus on POEs and achieving local superiority within a small area (138).

The tactical threat posed by PLA SOF contingents is high as regards their training and on-the-ground tactical capability. They are apparently well-trained and very capable units; during a recent SOF exercise held in Estonia, PLA SOF competed against 28 other SOF units from countries like Britain, Italy and France, and garnered third place overall (Estonian teams took first and second place) (139). The strategic threat posed by PLA SOF units is somewhat lower, primarily because of their logistical weakness. They are,

¹⁴ The December 26 2004 tsunamis, which swept through the Indian Ocean and devastated Indonesia's coastal communities.

like their conventional brethren, limited to regional power projection, a situation exacerbated by their lack of dedicated deployment and infiltration transportation and attached crews.

In the same way that watching developments in the PRC conventional military can provide insights as to what the PRC and PLA have learned and seek to achieve militarily and strategically in the future, so can keeping an eye on PLA SOF developments. Things to watch for in PLA SOF include the following:

- 1) An expanded logistics capability. Although the PLAAF acquired Russian IL76 long-range transport planes (140), these aircraft are not assigned to or configured for special operations tasking. Look for the acquisition and assignment of an American SOF-type dedicated logistics capability on the order of a 160th SOAR or a SEAL-type Special Boat Unit (SBU), most likely in response to a failed PLA SOF training or real-time operation. An expanded and *integral* logistics and transportation capability within PLA SOF could indicate that the PRC has realized the problems inherent in mixing and matching special operations and non-special operations assets to execute special operations missions and is finally prepared to invest the time and money for the gear and crew training necessary to ensure that both men and machines are up to sufficient standards for special operations tasking. The creation and development of such a capability could also signal that the PRC seeks to assign an expanded mission to its PLA SOF units, missions that require specialized vehicles and special operations-trained crews to increase the likelihood of success.
- 2) A unified PLA SOF command structure and leadership. This probably will not happen as long as the PRC uses the PLA as a tool for both internal and external security. Again, it will likely take an operational disaster to make a PLA SOF unified command structure a possibility, but it should exist if only to address specific SOF concerns and advise the CMC as to the realistic capabilities of its SOF contingents at the senior military level. The creation and development of an additional bureaucratic layer between the individual PLA SOF units and the CMC could indicate a realization within the CMC that it doesn't have all of the answers

and might require the input and advice of active PLA SOF experts who are not a part of the political machinery to gain a better and more accurate appraisal of PLA SOF capabilities. A PLA SOF SOCOM-type structure could also signal that PLA SOF has reached a level of maturity within the PLA and has a base of internal leadership senior enough to represent the community as a whole on an equal footing with conventional PLA officers, with a strong enough voice to be heard at the highest levels of the PRC if necessary to protect their community.

- 3) Extra-territorial deployments of PLA SOF units in response to regional conflicts. The PLA has deployed 4,000 troops to Sudan to provide security for its oil development endeavors there (141). It has sent military and technical advisors to every country that it has ever sold and delivered weapons and military equipment. It has even deployed peacekeeping troops to Liberia under the banner of the United Nations, and flown military cargo planes full of supplies to aid Indonesia after the tsunamis. What it has not done since the Sino-Vietnamese War is deploy soldiers, special or otherwise, to external conflict regions as active combatants¹⁵. Sending a bunch of glorified security guards or humanitarian helpers is one matter; deploying a unit specifically tasked to look for a fight is quite another. Such a deployment by PLA SOF would potentially signal an enhancement of PLA SOF power projection capabilities in response to an external threat, creating and developing an American SOF-type UW capability to fight an unconventional conflict. If Chinese interests abroad are threatened in a particular manner by a certain kind of enemy, PLA SOF with a UW mission could be the force of choice to counter it. If, for instance, rebel forces sufficiently threatened the Chinese oil projects in Sudan (142)--potentially a serious threat to the Chinese economy and state but not one requiring the full and furious might of the PLA--Sudan could conceivably see the deployment of PLA SOF with a UW mission, Counter-Insurgency, or Foreign Internal Defense, in support of intertwined PRC economic and security concerns. Whether or not these forces were actually invited in by the

¹⁵ The Spratlys are claimed by the PRC (and four other countries) as sovereign territory, so do not count.

host country would be a moot point, as they could easily be camouflaged within the ranks of the other 4,000 PLA troops on oil security duty. A little closer to home, perhaps terrorists or pirates are specifically targeting Chinese cargo vessels and oil tankers passing through the Malacca Straits, again potentially threatening the PRC's external economic and state interests but not to a degree that massive conventional military force is required or desired. PLA SOF units might covertly deploy to the area, with or without the knowledge of the Indonesian or Malaysian governments, with a UW Counter-Terrorism mission in support of the PRC's economic and security concerns.

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